GARRY WILLS ON OLIVER STONE / RICK MOODY ON THOMAS PYNCHON

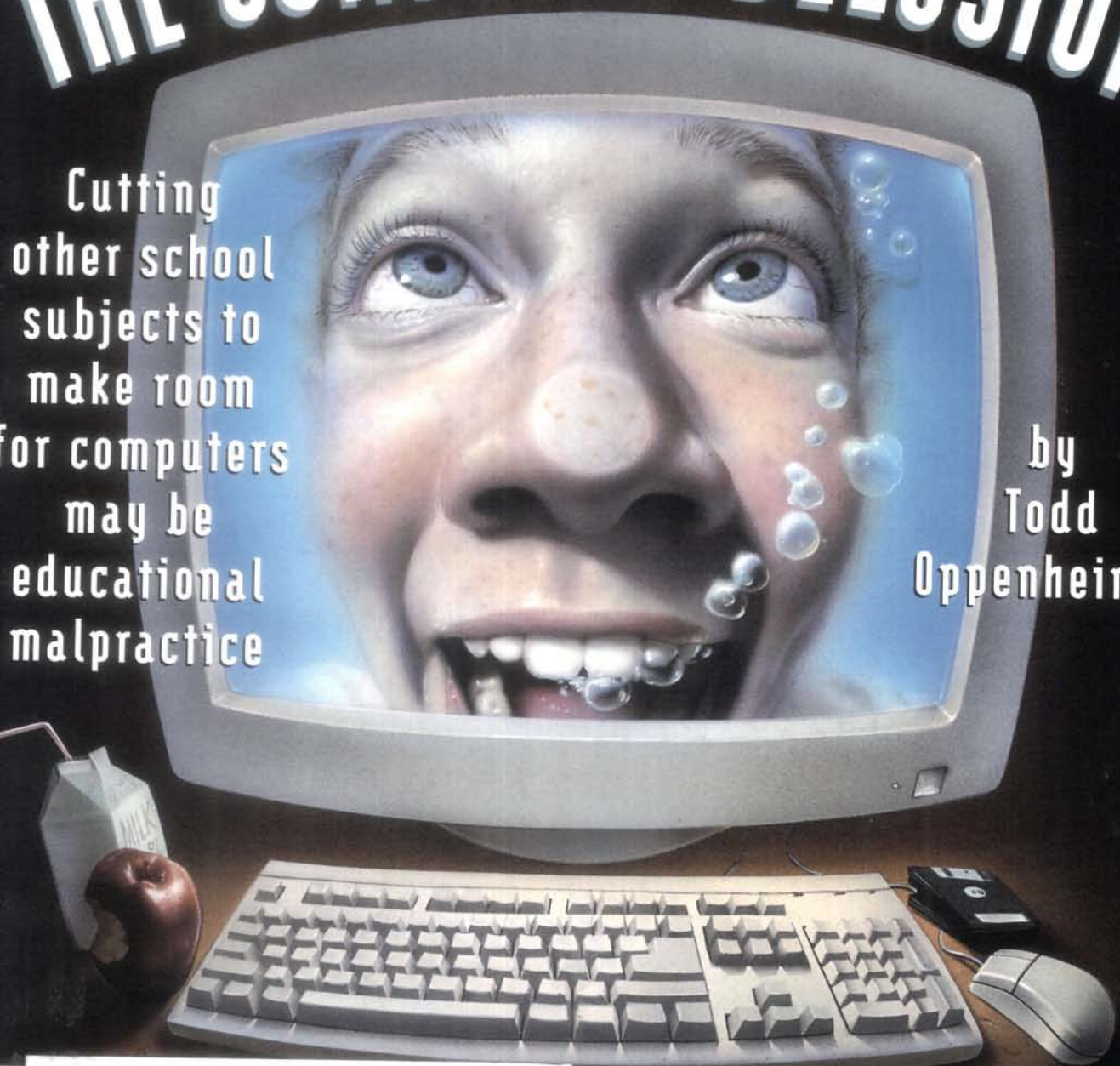
The Atlantic Monthly

JULY 1997

THE COMPUTER DELUSION

Cutting other school subjects to make room for computers may be educational malpractice

by Todd Oppenheimer



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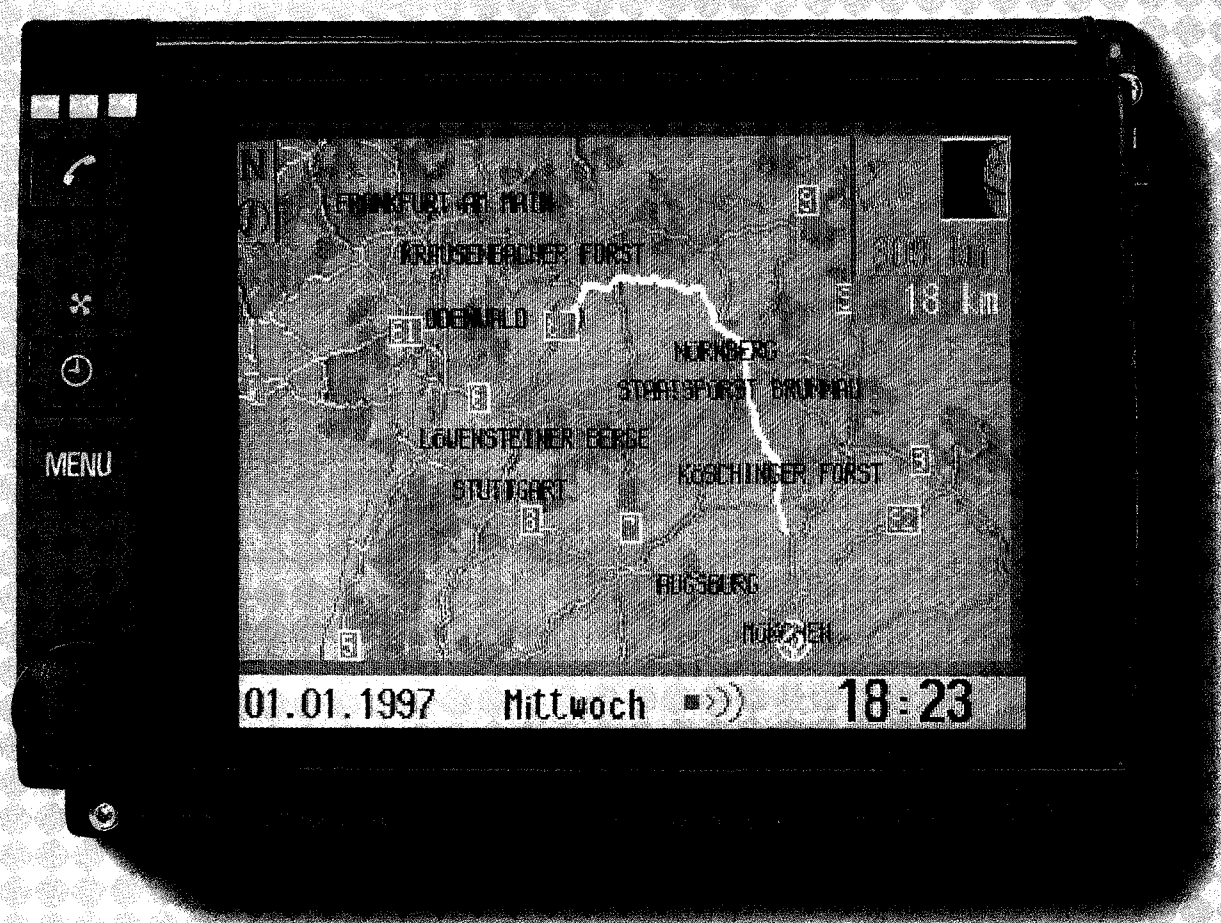

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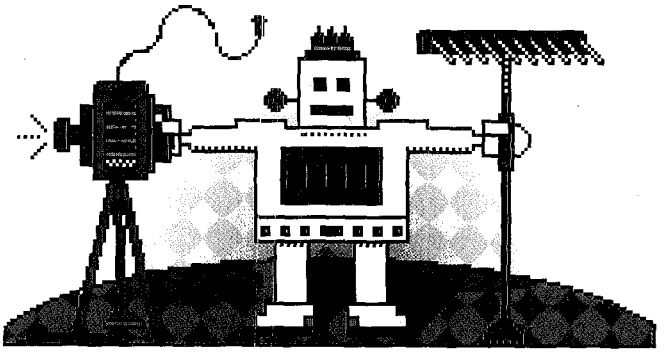

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IN describing changes to the format of *The Atlantic Monthly* that were made in 1937, the editors acknowledged the need always "to accommodate the modern temper."

Not surprisingly, the modern temper still needs accommodating. To that end—and in very much the same spirit as was evidenced sixty years ago—our new-media editors have for the past few years been building an addition to *The Atlantic* where we hope that readers from around the world will congregate: our World Wide Web site, known as Atlantic Unbound (www.TheAtlantic.com). We're pleased to announce that the site was one of five nominated this year for the first-ever National Magazine Award for general excellence in new media. (Three *Atlantic* stories were also nominated for the fiction award: "Horse Heaven Hills," by Christina Adam; "The Greatest Show on Earth," by Sheila Gordon; and "Cosmopolitan," by Akhil Sharma.)

First-time visitors to Atlantic Unbound will be surprised at the depth and range of material offered. Each month articles from the current edition of *The Atlantic* are made available online and enhanced for the Web with links to past *Atlantic* articles, primary sources, other Web sites of interest, audio clips, and more. Back issues, starting with September, 1995, are also easy to call up and search. When topical and relevant, articles from *The Atlantic*'s print archives are included as well; our "Flashbacks" archive already contains many of *The Atlantic*'s most historically important articles, and it continues to grow. A consistent draw to the site are the Poetry Pages—especially the "Audible Anthology," in which poets with work in the print edition read their poems aloud. Atlantic Unbound receives some 50,000 visits each week, and the number is growing.

Atlantic Unbound is much more than simply *The Atlantic Monthly* online. It is host to regular original columns by *Atlantic* editors and writers, dispatches from our overseas correspondents, interviews with our contributors, book excerpts and readings, interactive word games, and more. Most important, perhaps, is Post & Riposte, an open online forum in which readers from around the world engage one another in conversation and debate. Each month we invite authors in the current issue of *The Atlantic* to discuss their articles in Post & Riposte; members of *The Atlantic*'s editorial staff are also often on hand to take part in the discussions. The result is stimulating discourse at a level that is rare online. We invite you to join the conversation. —THE EDITORS

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LETTERS

Official English

On behalf of the Official English movement, I would like to respond to your April cover story, "Should English Be the Law?" by Robert D. King.

First let me address the conclusion of King's essay: "We are not even close to the danger point. . . . Language does not threaten American unity." He prescribes a policy of "benign neglect." Even if we grant his premise that we are not yet in a dangerous situation, it does not make sense to postpone setting a language policy for the United States until we are in the midst of a linguistic crisis—by then it may be too late. By acting now to make English the official language, Congress may prevent such a crisis from ever occurring.

However, even benign neglect would be preferable to the current policy of active expansion of multilingual government services. One can take a driver's-license exam in twenty languages in Michigan, twenty-three in New York, twenty-five in Massachusetts, and thirty-three in California. And these are only a fraction of the 329 languages spoken in the United States in 1990.

The policy of benign neglect toward language worked for nearly 200 years. But as King himself acknowledges, things began to change about thirty years ago. Extremists began pushing an activist multilingual policy for our government, attacking one of the great unifying factors in our nation's history. Yet in the Orwellian doublespeak that is the official language of the politically correct, it is the movement in favor of a common language that is now called divisive.

Mauro E. Mujica
U.S. English, Inc.
Washington, D.C.

Robert D. King is disingenuous in concluding that "benign neglect is a good policy for any country when it comes to language." The social policies mandating bilingual education, salary differentials, and hiring preferences for bilingual employees, and special services for non-English-speaking people, are anything but benign neglect. These policies, along with affirmative action, multiculturalism, and so forth, are in fact part of the dominant liberal social-engineering paradigm that has been in ascendance for some thirty years in this country.

Bob Fromuth
Modesto, Calif.

There is nothing particularly offensive in what Robert D. King says in his recent article. It's what he doesn't say that presents the problem. Nowhere in his piece, for example, do the words "bilingual education" appear. He does not even hint that he is aware that bilingual education threatens to leave more than a million Hispanic youngsters functionally illiterate in English, the language they will need if they are ever to integrate fully into the economic, social, and political mainstream of this society.

I would welcome a policy of "benign neglect" when it comes to language. Ever since the Supreme Court's *Lau* decision, in 1974, however, the federal government has coerced literally hundreds of school districts into instituting full-fledged native-language-maintenance programs, even when local educators would have preferred to adopt an alternative such as English as a Second Language. The result is a legacy of half-educated children—almost all Hispanic—who have not learned English as well as they might have precisely because the federal government intervened.

King ignores other federal actions that similarly abuse his rule of benign neglect. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development has threatened to withhold millions of dollars in federal housing funds from cities that refuse to print documents in languages other than English. The Voting Rights Act continues to force localities to print for-

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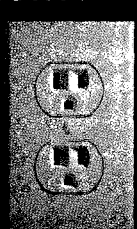

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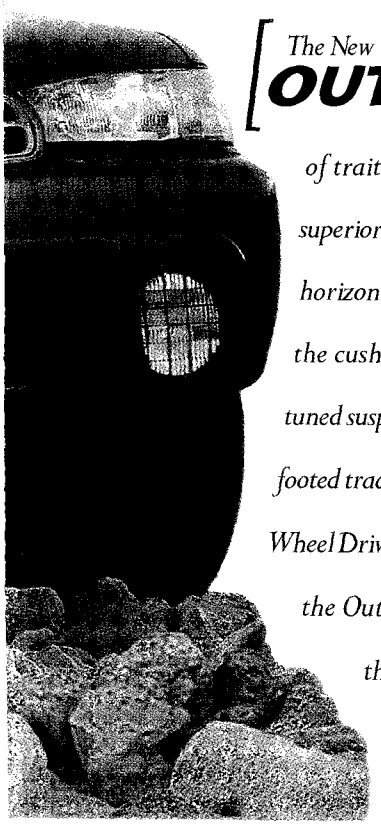

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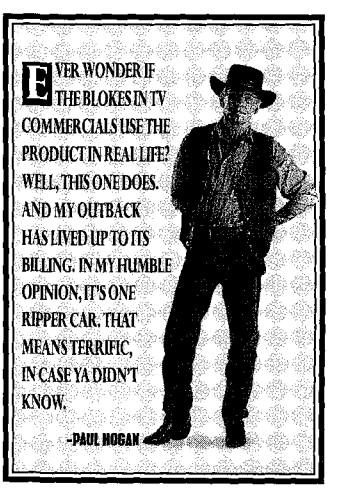

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eign-language ballots. Last year the Yuba County, California, registrar of voters complained in congressional testimony that this mandate would cost her constituents nearly $30,000 in 1996. She has received only one request in sixteen years from a constituent seeking foreign-language voting assistance.

With meddlesome policies like these, is it any wonder that so many Americans want to make English their country's official language?

Linda Chavez
Center for Equal Opportunity
Washington, D.C.

Robert D. King replies:

There is little difference between what my critics want and what I want—that every citizen of the United States speak, understand, read, and write English. But there is a gulf of difference between us regarding means. U.S. English thinks that passing a law making English the official language of the country will do the job. I don't. Linguistic history teaches painfully unambiguous lessons about language laws: they are divisive, they are unenforceable, they make people hate each other, they encourage snitches ("Juanita talked Spanish during the break!"). Worse, they don't work.

So what might work? Linda Chavez's letter points the way. If you don't like bilingual official documents (it's not a big issue with me), then repeal the laws that mandated them in the first place. Bilingual education? I've seen school districts in Texas where it works just the way it is supposed to: little kids enter kindergarten speaking no English, and by the second grade everything is in English. But I know of other places where bilingual education continues far too long, where it is ruinously bureaucratized or politicized, where it has become zany (for example, demanding instruction in ancient Aztec, I'm told by a caller on a radio talk show). For me it's empirical, not ideological: if bilingual ed works, great; if it doesn't, change it. But *don't* pass a national law making English our official language (with unintended but predictably bad consequences) in order to remedy bilingual ballots and bilingual education.

The letters printed here make reasonable points. Most of the others I have received have been overwhelmingly vituperative—which reinforces my conviction that only foolish governments mess with an icon of such extraordinary power and intensity as language.

Grammar Wars

Mark Halpern's defense of usage orthodoxies ("A War That Never Ends," March *Atlantic*) offers my own *Atlantic* article ("The Decline of Grammar," December, 1983) as a paradigm of "leave-your-language-alone" descriptivism, along with Steven Pinker's book *The Language Instinct*. Pinker can speak for himself, but only a willful misreading of my article would lead someone to describe it in this way.

Halpern characterizes my views by saying, "Nunberg objects to the prescriptivist approach on two grounds: it is futile, since language will follow its natural destiny despite all the efforts of the prescriptivists; and it is somehow wrong—immoral? unethical?—to try to interfere. . . ." He is right about the first part, dead wrong about the second. As he notes, I did liken prescriptive grammarians to landscape gardeners trying to arrest the processes of continental drift, and I did say that in the long run English will survive whatever abuses its critics complain of. But I went on to argue that this by no means invalidates the prescriptivist program.

> Yet it is hard to take comfort in the scholars' sanguine detachment. . . . It may be that my children will use *gift* and *impact* as verbs without the slightest compunction (just as I use *contact*, wondering that anyone ever bothered to object to it). But I can't overcome the feeling that it is wrong for me to use them in that way and that people of my generation who say "We decided to gift them with a desk set" are in some sense guilty of a moral lapse, whether because they are ignorant or because they are weak. In the face of that conviction, it really doesn't matter to me whether *to gift* will eventually prevail, carried on the historical tide. Our glory, Silone said, lies in not having to submit to history.

It is hard to see how anyone could read this as a descriptivist credo, and in fact my article defended a reasonable program of language criticism, one sensitive to the complexities of both received opinion and modern linguistic research. Fortunately, it isn't necessary to belabor the point here, since the editors of *The Atlantic* have thoughtfully made my original article available on the magazine's Web site (www.TheAtlantic.com), where interested readers can compare what I actually said with Halpern's version of it.

Another point is more important, though: it's a remarkable feature of Halpern's article that he discusses no particular examples of grammatical rules or prescriptive dicta, as if the entire controversy could be resolved in the abstract by appeals to first principles—as if you could make up your mind about language without ever talking about words. In the event, though, the grammar "war" to which his title alludes is not about to be won by aerial bombardment; what's called for is something more like street-to-street combat. Some prescriptive dicta are mere superstitions, as Fowler put it, while others are solidly based in linguistic principle. Some are the manifestations of covert racism and class prejudice, while others embody a conception of the language as an instrument that overcomes these distinctions. Like any form of criticism, prescriptivism is all a matter of making picky and tiresome discriminations.

It's true that one can find the same sort of programmatic oversimplifications in many of the descriptivist linguists whose views Halpern is attacking (in fact, as one reads his article, one is struck by how much his neo-orthodoxy shares with their heterodoxy). The effect is to turn the debate into just another shrill chapter of the culture wars, as people lose sight of all the subtleties that make a critic like Fowler still worth reading. This is the danger I was alluding to in the title of my own article: "The Decline of Grammar" referred not to worsening standards of usage but to the trivialization of modern discussions of the problem. Unfortunately, Halpern's article does little to allay this concern.

Geoffrey Nunberg
Palo Alto, Calif.

Mark Halpern does little to elucidate the complex interrelations between prescriptive grammar and unruly, evolving usage. It would help enormously if he could acknowledge that standards of

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"correct" grammar evolve along with language itself—that "good English" in 1997 is not the same as good English in 1597 or, in all probability, good English in 2397. His article also demonstrates the severely limited power of analogies—his own as well as those he takes up from others—to resolve complex questions. For the clincher to his prescriptivist argument he gives us a quotation from Samuel Johnson beginning thus: "Tongues [languages], like governments, have a natural tendency to degeneration." Can this really be Halpern's own understanding of language change—perpetual decline staved off only by the efforts of prescriptive grammarians?

Languages don't degenerate, but they do reflect and embody social change. Consider the impact of increased sensitivity to gender issues, as exemplified by discontent with the so-called "generic" pronoun "he," used to refer to both males and females. Usage change has been influenced by art in the form of "s/he" and similar coinages, but nature has provided a sort of grassroots rejection of gender bias: most speakers now regularly (and unselfconsciously) use plural pronominal forms ("they," "them," "their"), which do not specify gender, as in "Everyone should follow their own conscience." The existing situation creates a problem in linguistic etiquette of concern to English teachers and, presumably, technical editors like Halpern, but one's preference in such matters ought not to be glorified by high-toned appeals to "the clarity and richness of communication." The *American Heritage Dictionary*'s lengthy usage note on "he," which concludes with the observation that "the entire question is unlikely to be resolved in the near future," reveals much more about the problematic relations between changing usage and prescriptive grammar than the weary, oversimplified dichotomy that Halpern offers your readers.

Phillip J. Hanse
Jamestown, N. Dak.

Mark Halpern replies:

As Geoffrey Nunberg is well aware, I regard his position on usage as far more complex, interesting, and therefore dangerous than that of the simple leave-the-language-alone school.

He objects that I offer no examples of "grammatical rules or prescriptive dicta"; he is missing my point. My article is an attack on the claims of linguistic scholars to a privileged place at the table where usage decisions are made, not a plea for any particular rules or an argument that rules in general will save us. Rules have their uses, but only for the already literate; in the absence of a foundation of taste and judgment, rules may do more harm than good ("the wise man points at the stars; the fool looks at his finger").

While asking me to offer concrete examples in support of a position I do not hold, Numberg fails to support his own main contention: that linguistic science can settle or at least shed much light on usage issues. What linguists can often do is demolish the pretensions to scholarship of "pop grammarians" or "mavens" when they are so foolish as to try to buttress their judgments on usage with their usually skimpy and obsolete stock of linguistic knowledge. But once the linguists have done that demolition work and the dust has settled, the usage issues remain—and linguistic science does nothing to settle them.

Phillip Hanse is correct in stating that I did "little to elucidate the complex interrelations between prescriptive grammar and unruly, evolving usage." It was no part of my intention to do so. If it would "help enormously" for me to acknowledge that the standards of good usage change as time goes by, I will gladly do so—in fact I did just that when I wrote, "The rules we [prescriptivists] propose . . . will need continual review and revision."

Mr. Hanse wants me to understand the "severely limited power of analogies . . . to resolve complex questions." I don't think analogies have *any* power to resolve complex or even simple questions—they can only illuminate and clarify issues. The analogies that I discussed were all introduced by Nunberg and Pinker, not by me; my sole concern with them was to point out that they support my position, not their authors'.

My final quotation from Samuel Johnson was not meant to clinch my argument—it has nothing to do with my main argument in fact—but is there only to show that Pinker was wrong in presenting Johnson as a champion of *his* position.

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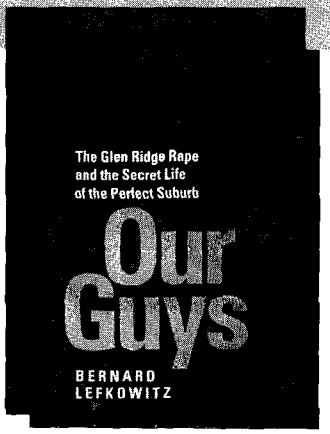

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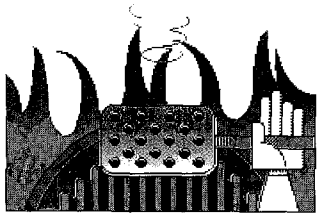
THE JULY ALMANAC

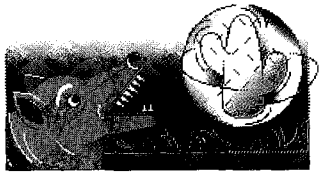


Food

July **4**: Barbecue season peaks today—some 80 percent of Americans will celebrate the holiday at a cookout—and the season for food-borne illnesses is in full swing as well (hot weather and outdoor dining provide prime conditions for bacteria to multiply). This year some consumer groups are urging the public to consider a new issue: whether to buy beef that has been mechanically deboned. The most common method squeezes meat scraps from a carcass, supposedly leaving the bones intact. However, a U.S. Department of Agriculture study has found that pieces of bone, bone marrow, and spinal cord sometimes get into the meat. This may be cause for particular concern in that spinal cords can carry bovine spongiform encephalopathy, or mad cow disease, which has been tentatively linked to several deaths in Britain. Concerned consumers will need to ask about processing methods: mechanically deboned beef is not labeled as such. At least two U.S. fast-food chains, McDonald's and Burger King, do not use meat processed in this way.

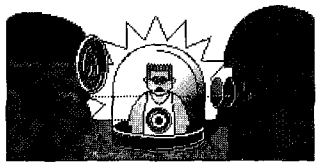
The Skies

Mars is in the southwest sky at nightfall this month, and on July **11** will be below the waxing Moon. July **19**: Full Moon, also known this month as the Thunder, Hay, and Giant Cactus Moon. **25**: The Moon approaches Saturn in the predawn sky.



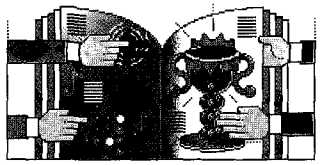
Health & Safety

July **1**: After today purse strings will tighten for the families of some disabled children, as children with disabilities must meet stricter standards in order to qualify for Supplemental Security Income. Under the terms of the welfare-reform bill enacted last summer a child's disability must now meet narrower criteria in terms of severity. In addition, individualized assessments of how well children function will no longer be a routine part of the evaluation process, as they were in the past. According to the Children's Defense Fund, the children who are most likely to be affected are those with hard-to-quantify developmental disabilities, such as autism and mental-health problems, and those with some forms of cerebral palsy and respiratory problems. Opponents of the measure argue that disabled children seeking SSI will now be held to stricter standards than adults.



Government

July **1**: Parts of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 take effect today. Among them is a provision limiting the circumstances under which insurers can deny coverage for pre-existing health conditions, such as pregnancy and cancer, to subscribers who are new to their plans because they changed or lost their jobs, as long as those subscribers enroll promptly. In the past insurers could deny coverage for a pre-existing condition for 12 months. Now they must in effect credit prior coverage for that condition: for example, someone covered for eight months under previous insurance can be denied coverage for only four months. Someone covered for 12 months or longer will face no wait. Also today, according to last year's welfare-reform bill, states must submit comprehensive welfare plans to the Secretary of Health and Human Services, based on receiving block grants rather than on participating in the federal program Aid to Families with Dependent Children, which has been eliminated after more than 60 years.

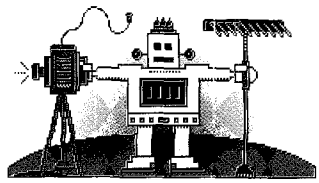


Arts & Letters

July **1**: The publication day of *Baroque Art in the Seventeenth Century*—the first of 22 volumes of art history for the blind and visually impaired. Each title in the series Art History Through Touch and Sound will contain tactile diagrams, an audio text, photographs with large-print and Braille captions, and "sound-compositions" meant to recast visual images for the ear. For Jan Davidsz de Heem's painting *Still Life With Parrots*, for example, the tinkling of silver and crystal is used to evoke a party; similarly, the echoes of footfalls help give a sense of the spatial dynamics of St. Peter's piazza, in Rome. The series will span prehistoric through contemporary art; it was developed by a nonprofit organization, Art Education for the Blind.

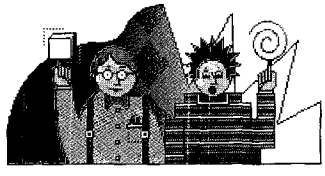
Environment

July **4**: Today NASA's *Pathfinder* becomes the first spacecraft to visit Mars since Viking II in 1976. It will release a robot that will explore the planet's landscape and beam images back to Earth. *Pathfinder* is one of a number of Mars missions under way or being planned: in September, NASA's *Global Surveyor* will enter Mars's orbit and begin an extensive survey of the planet and its atmosphere. **25**: The Environmental Protection Agency will announce new regulations for the burning of medical waste. The requirements, mandated by the Clean Air Act, will include the first federal limits on emissions of dioxin and other toxic pollutants. Emissions may drop further than mandated: because the rules will require costly upgrades of facilities, many hospitals are expected to abandon incineration in favor of other methods of disposal.



75 Years Ago

Katherine Fullerton Gerould, writing in the July, 1922, issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*: "In the long run, the radical mood has always had its way with the world, or we should still be stuck at late Sumerian fashions. Since the race has never ceased to change its ways and call its violent shifts 'progress,' how comes it that the standpatter's type was not eliminated centuries, or ages, ago? . . . Practically speaking, the conservative has always gone under—after a few years, or a few centuries, or a few millennia. He has no pragmatic warrant for still existing among us. Yet he does exist; and not merely as the plesiosaurus is said to survive in the Argentine. He is all over the place. . . . The conservative temperament never achieves more than a temporary victory. . . . Yet it never dies. It must be that the race finds some quality in conservatism itself that appeals."



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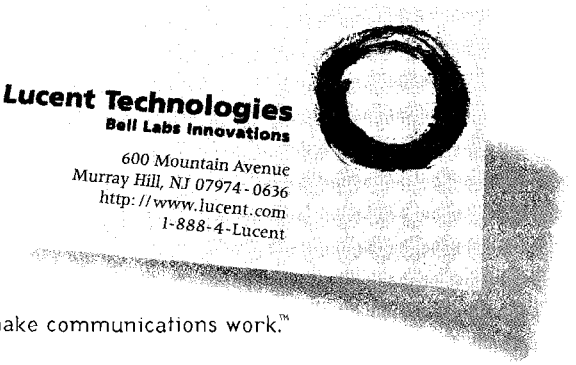

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The Mall of Fame

Even in neglect, a shrine to our society's values embodies them still

by Richard Rubin

WHEN they had finally gotten clear of King George and set about the business of establishing a new country, America's Founding Fathers wanted to sever their ties to the old order of Europe. So wary were they of the trappings of monarchy—especially an official aristocracy—that they declined to establish any kind of national mechanism to recognize greatness. There would be no knighthoods in America; fame could be acknowledged, and revoked, only by popular assent.

Henry Mitchell MacCracken wanted to change that—somewhat. MacCracken was a Presbyterian minister, and also the chancellor of New York University. A century ago he decided to expand his college from crowded, commercial Washington Square to the more bucolic Fordham Heights (now University Heights) section of the Bronx. MacCracken bought a parcel of land on one of the highest natural elevations in the city, once the site of Fort Number Eight, a British installation. Then he secured a $2 million gift from the daughter of the railroad baron Jay Gould, and hired Stanford White to design and build the city's most beautiful campus. But MacCracken had something still bigger in mind.

Henry Mitchell MacCracken took great pride in his country's history and heritage. It pained him that America had no pantheon, no shrine to those whose achievements and contributions would forever touch the nation and even the world—jurists and statesmen, scientists and inventors, writers and artists. So he decided that he would build an American pantheon on his new campus. He had White design a 630-foot open-air Beaux Arts colonnade with niches for busts and tablets; it would sit prominently on the crest of a hill overlooking Washington Heights and the Palisades. But what to call it? MacCracken came up with the words "hall of fame"—and called his pantheon the Hall of Fame for Great Americans.

JANE ADDAMS, MEMBER

"Fame" is one of those words that have changed some over the years. These days it means "celebrity." But in MacCracken's time "fame" was a more value-laden concept, closer in meaning to "renown." And MacCracken wanted to make sure that the people enshrined in his Hall of Fame were truly famous, not just memorable. So he established a board of electors, composed of men and women who were themselves possessed of some measure of renown, ostensibly people of great character and sound judgment. Over the years that body would include the most respected writers, historians, and educators of their day, along with scores of congressmen, a dozen Supreme Court justices, and six Presidents; seven former electors have themselves been elected to the Hall of Fame. To ensure that nominees would be evaluated with

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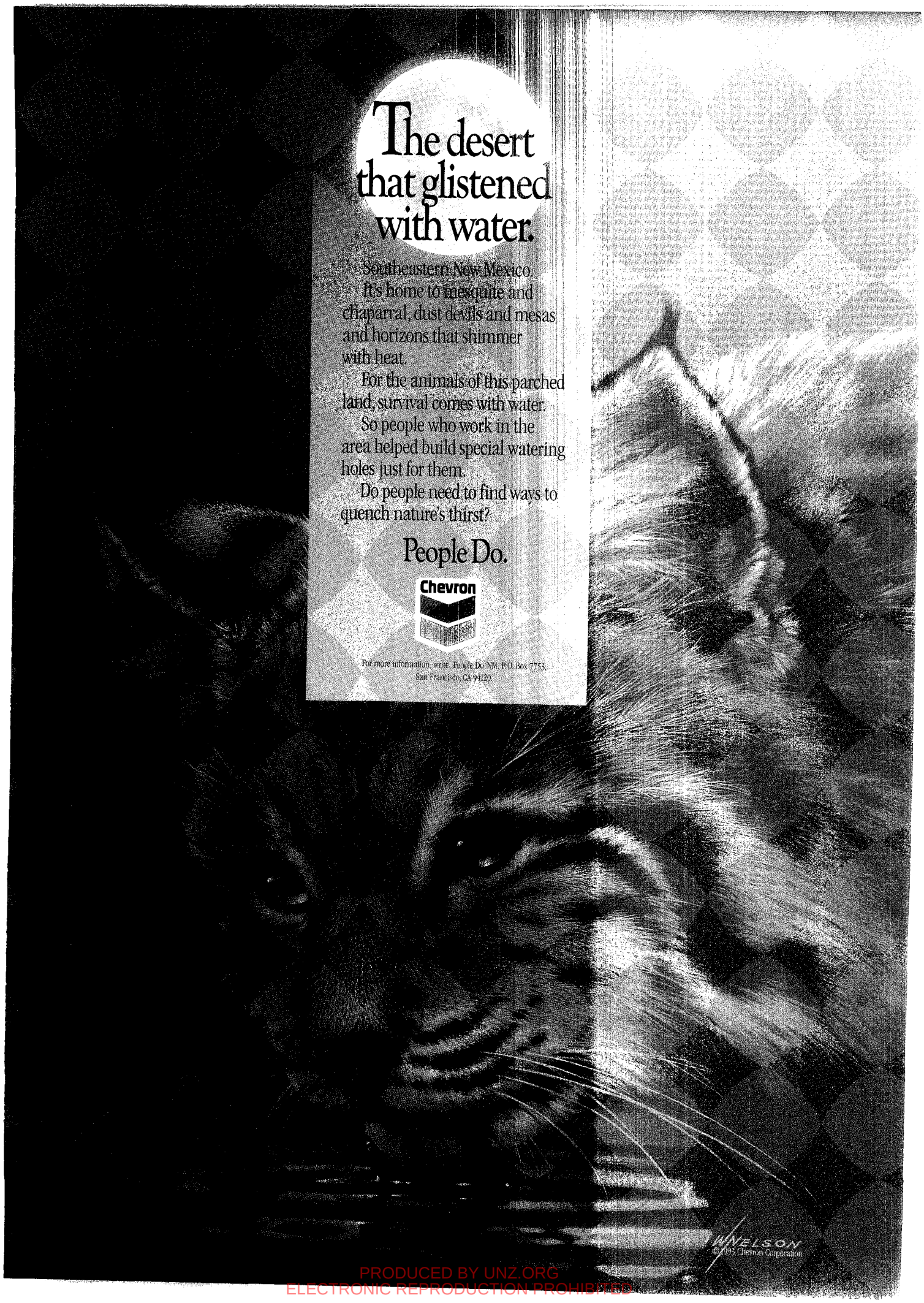

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adequate sobriety and perspective, it was decided that no one could be elected who had not been dead for at least twenty-five years. Everyone thought that was just fine; after all, as the old maxim holds, "Fame is a food that dead men eat."

Even before the Hall of Fame was formally dedicated, on Memorial Day, 1901, it had become a focal point for national pride. Part of its appeal lay in the fact that it was a truly democratic institution—anyone could nominate a candidate, admission would be free, and although NYU served as a steward, raising funds and running the elections, the whole thing was technically the property of the American people. But more important, it was the first institution to unite the notions of fame and America. The country was still in its adolescence, still struggling to emerge from the shadows of the great powers of Europe, still trying to heal the rifts of the Civil War that had torn it apart. The Hall of Fame promised, for the first time, to launch Americans into the orbit of universal immortality. In a sense it was the vehicle of our validation, and people took it very, very seriously. Newspaper publishers used their editorial pages to lobby for or against nominees, and groups like the American Bar Association and the United Daughters of the Confederacy waged extensive, expensive campaigns to get "their" candidates elected. Installation ceremonies were elaborate events. For a while the term "Hall of Famer" carried greater cachet than "Nobel laureate," and a hilltop in the Bronx seemed, to many, the highest spot in the country, if not the world.

▪ ▪ ▪

It was inevitable that something as popular and prestigious as the Hall of Fame would inspire spinoffs.

One of the first was the Baseball Hall of Fame, which opened in Cooperstown, New York, in 1939. Four decades had passed since the establishment of the Hall of Fame for Great Americans, and the country had changed quite a bit. We had conquered the world's greatest military power, only to be ourselves laid low by the world's greatest economic crisis. Radio had emerged and ushered us into the media age. Inventors and scientists and statesmen and thinkers were no longer the heroes of the day. Athletes were. Yet not a single one had made it into the Hall of Fame, and none ever would. The hall's standards of admission—indeed, its defining mission—made that impossible.

So the Baseball Hall of Fame filled a void. Its mission was different. It had to be, because this new hall of fame, with its narrow scope and particular focus, could not afford to hold to the standards of the original. The people enshrined in Cooperstown were undoubtedly gifted and even inspirational, their achievements not easily forgotten, but it would be a stretch in most cases to claim that those achievements will forever touch the nation and the world. The Baseball Hall of Fame's founders knew this; they also knew that its inherent limitations liberated them to diverge from the staid, almost ascetic dignity of the original. They weren't restricted to bronze busts and plaques; they could build glass display cases and fill them with jerseys and gloves and balls and banners. Nominees didn't have to be dead, just retired—so much for the old maxim. Their electors weren't senators and historians and poets; they were sportswriters (who now have their own hall of fame, in Salisbury, North Carolina). And the Baseball Hall of Fame could, and did, charge admission.

That last item could have sunk the new venture, but it didn't. People came and paid to get in—a lot of people. So many, in fact, that people decided to open a Football Hall of Fame, in Canton, Ohio; a Basketball Hall of Fame, in Springfield, Massachusetts; a Boxing Hall of Fame, in Canastota, New York; and a Bowling Hall of Fame, in St. Louis. Today there are halls of fame for volleyball, lacrosse, tennis, soccer, swimming, skiing, golf, yachting, polo, fishing, racquetball, gymnastics, field hockey, figure skating, auto racing, horse racing, water skiing, weightlifting, skeet shooting, snowmobiling, surfing, curling, and dozens of other pastimes. Canada opened a Hockey Hall of Fame, in Toronto. Individual states opened their own athletic halls of fame. So did cities. So did teams.

By this time, of course, the definition of "fame" had changed dramatically. It no longer required achievement on a broad scale coupled with some kind of lasting universal contribution. Now achievement alone was enough, even achievement within a narrow context.

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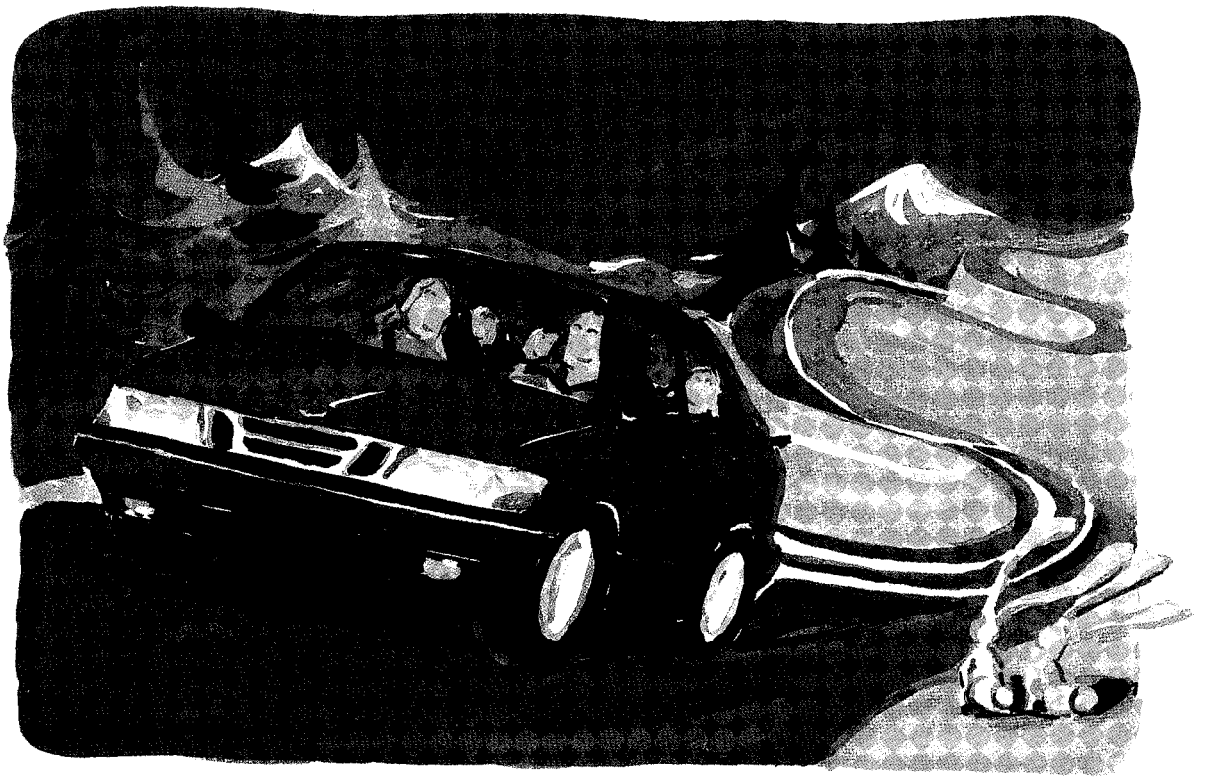
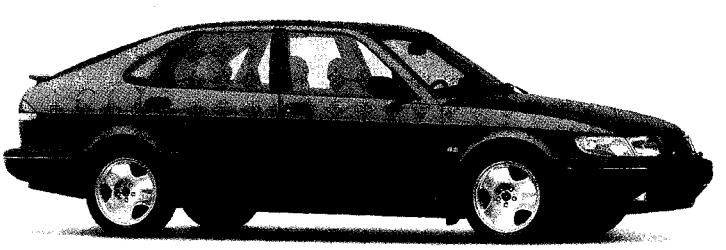


Shouldn't the family chauffeur have some fun?



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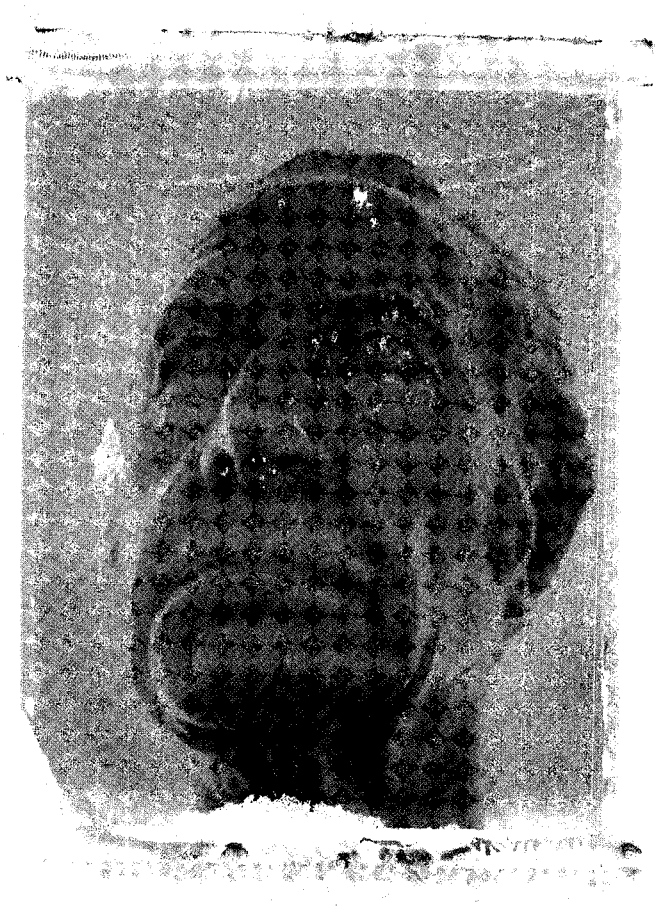
This change opened the hall-of-fame door—opened it wide. If athletes could have their own halls of fame, why couldn't cowboys, policemen, businessmen? Today they do, in Oklahoma City, Miami Beach, and Chicago, respectively. There is a "Hall of Flame" for firemen, in Phoenix. Astronauts have a hall in Titusville, Florida. Daredevils have one in Niagara Falls. Rock-and-roll has one in Cleveland. It is just a short drive from the Checkers Hall of Fame, in Petal, Mississippi, to the Agricultural Aviation Hall of Fame, honoring crop dusters, in Jackson. St. Petersburg seems like a logical place for the Shuffleboard Hall of Fame, but why is the Marbles Hall of Fame in Wildwood, New Jersey? What's the Burlesque Hall of Fame doing in Helendale, California, in the Mojave Desert? Will the Clown Hall of Fame really bring busloads of tourists to Delavan, Wisconsin (population 7,000)? Can the Soap Box Derby Hall of Fame breathe new life into Akron? Should Newport's renaissance be attributed to the fact that it is home to halls of fame for tennis, yachting, *and* croquet?



GILBERT STUART, MEMBER

There are hundreds of halls of fame in America; no one knows for sure exactly how many. Some celebrate people who didn't actually do much more than exist. Some don't even celebrate people. Palo Alto, California, the home of Stanford University, is also home to the Barbie Hall of Fame, where visitors can pay four dollars to see America's most popular plastic doll in its many incarnations and outfits. Select Sires, a bovine-artificial-insemination cooperative, runs the Bull Hall of Fame, in Plain City, Ohio; its dozen honorees were chosen for the quality and quantity of their output. Michael Bohdan, an exterminator in Plano, Texas, has established a Cockroach Hall of Fame in the back of his shop; according to Bohdan, the museum, which features both gargantuan roaches and roaches dressed up to resemble Elvis, Liberace, and Ross Perot, is the third most popular tourist attraction in the Dallas area (after the Kennedy Memorial and Southfork Ranch). And there are *two* halls of fame honoring the once important, now irrelevant Route 66.

It would be easy from all this to draw the conclusion that the divorce of fame and achievement is now complete—that the only achievement most halls of fame celebrate these days is the achievement of fame itself. And it would be easier still to lay the blame at the feet of those who created and own such "lesser" shrines. But with a few exceptions the proprietors of America's halls of fame do not themselves bestow fame; they merely acknowledge it. Only society can bestow fame. And there is no surer measure of the values of a society than those things upon which it chooses to bestow fame—or from which it revokes it.

▪ ▪ ▪

Today the Hall of Fame for Great Americans is forgotten. For twenty years, in fact, it has been too broke to hold new elections, too broke even to commission busts of the people it elected two decades ago, including Louis Brandeis, Clara Barton, Luther Burbank, and Andrew Carnegie. It took nineteen years to raise the $25,000 needed to commission the bust of Franklin D. Roosevelt.

In 1973 NYU abruptly abandoned its Bronx campus and the Hall of Fame. Eventually the state bought the whole thing, and it is now in the hands of Bronx Community College. In the late 1970s the state spent $3 million restoring the colonnade's crumbling foundation; a few years ago it spent another $200,000 restoring the ninety-eight bronze busts, many of which had deteriorated badly. But private gifts, which were always the Hall of Fame's primary source of support, stopped coming many years ago. No one is quite sure why the public has abandoned the Hall of Fame for Great Americans, but it most definitely has.

These days hardly anyone even knows it exists. Only 20,000 people visit it each year, most of them local schoolchildren on field trips. What they see there is less a shrine than a tomb, the last repository of a seemingly defunct kind of American idealism and dignified self-respect. The state gives what it can for maintenance, but it's not nearly enough; there is evidence everywhere of the insidious presence of pigeons and vandals. Not long ago the latter pushed over the bust of Andrew Jackson, sending it tumbling down the hill toward the Harlem River, leaving nothing in the seventh President's niche but a bronze plaque bearing the quotation "Our federal union—it must and shall be preserved."

Nearby is the bust of Augustus Saint-Gaudens, arguably the country's greatest sculptor. Saint-Gaudens created the hall's bust of Abraham Lincoln, who was elected the first time around, in 1900; twenty years later the artist himself was elected. The quotation on his plaque—"Too much time cannot be spent in a task that is to endure for centuries"—could in days past have been the Hall of Fame's motto. Today it seems more like an epitaph.

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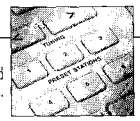

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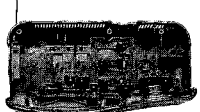

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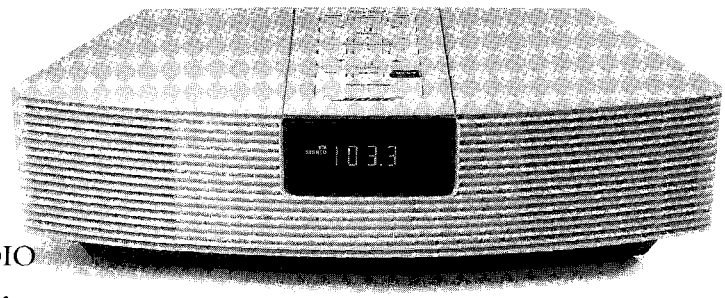

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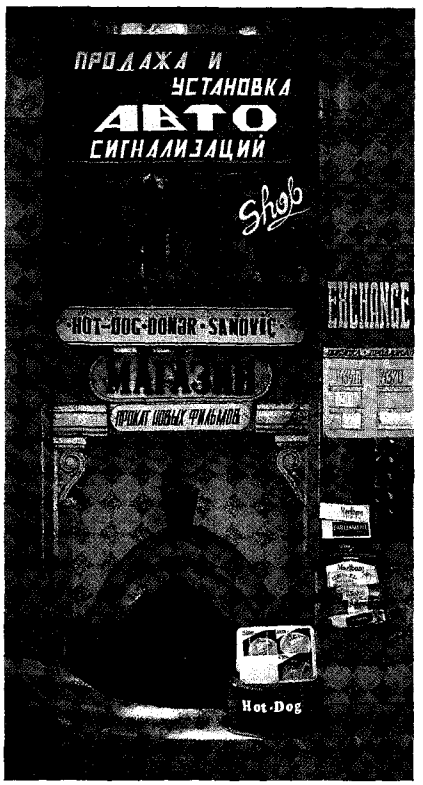

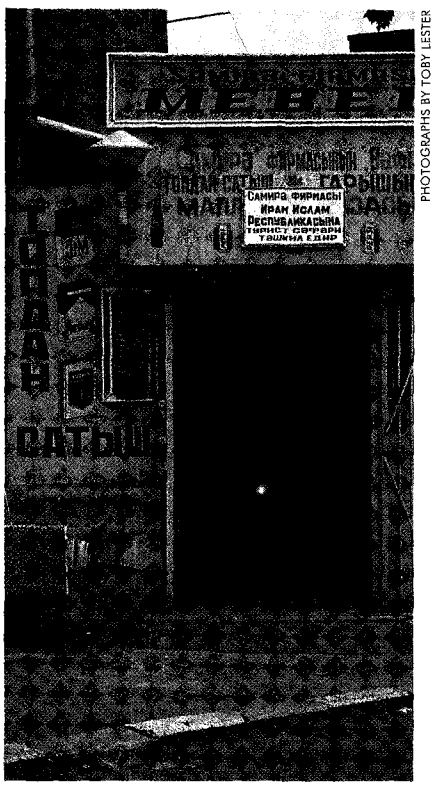

PHOTOGRAPHS BY TOBY LESTER

New-Alphabet Disease?

It's tough suddenly changing from one alphabet to another. Azerbaijan is on its third one this century

by Toby Lester

THINK for a minute about the agonies that Americans anticipated when the country was faced with the prospect of conversion to the metric system, in the 1970s. Miles to kilometers. Fahrenheit to centigrade. Acres to . . . what? *Hectares?* The nation shuddered, and went on pumping gas in gallons. Now imagine the reaction if, say, a newly elected Congress were to decide that our brand of English had to be written in an entirely different alphabet. Members of the House and the Senate might argue that the Latin alphabet we inherited from the Romans (usurpers, imperialists) had to be dropped. The ancient Greek alphabet (less ideologically tainted, closer to our Platonic and Aristotelian roots) would be proposed as an alternative. Debate leading up to the decision would split neatly down party lines, with one side dourly pointing out the enormous cost of making such a change and the other passionately championing it in the name of social liberation. Washington lobbyists and concerned diplomats would throw themselves aggressively behind one alphabet or the other.

In the end the President would sign into law a bill decreeing that English was henceforward to be written *only* in ancient Greek letters. The Constitution would be reprinted and distributed to libraries and schools nationwide; its opening words, which would still sound as they always have, might now be written "Ουι θε Πιπολ." *The New York Times*, delivered to newsstands all over the country, might become Θε Νου 'Ιορκ Ταιμς. A new generation of schoolchildren might meet Abraham Lincoln as 'Αβρααμ Λινκον.

In Azerbaijan, open for business—in three alphabets

Improbable? Maybe in the United States. But just such an attempt to change alphabets is now taking place in the former Soviet republic of Azerbaijan. As it lurched away from Russia and communism, the country's new government decreed in 1991 that Azerbaijani, which during most of Soviet rule had been written in the Cyrillic letters also used to write Russian, was now to be written exclusively in Latin letters. Though in most parts of the world this changing of alphabets might seem a bizarre form of cultural torture, for Azerbaijanis it is nothing new: they have changed alphabets twice before in this century—from Arabic to Latin (in the 1920s) and from Latin to Cyrillic (in the 1930s).

One hears a lot about the economic trauma of moving from a communist system to a free market, but some of the other psychological and social traumas of post-Soviet nation-building have received little attention in the West. The alphabet reform currently under way in Azerbaijan is the most difficult and ambitious ever undertaken. The significance of such an attempt is easy to ignore in the Americas, where the Latin alphabet reigns supreme from Point Barrow to Tierra del Fuego. But Azerbaijan is one of the world's great linguistic and orthographic battlegrounds; to a degree unimaginable in the West, alphabets there *are* politics, religion, and culture. Complex historical and linguistic forces are at play, an understanding of which will become increasingly important to outsiders as pros-

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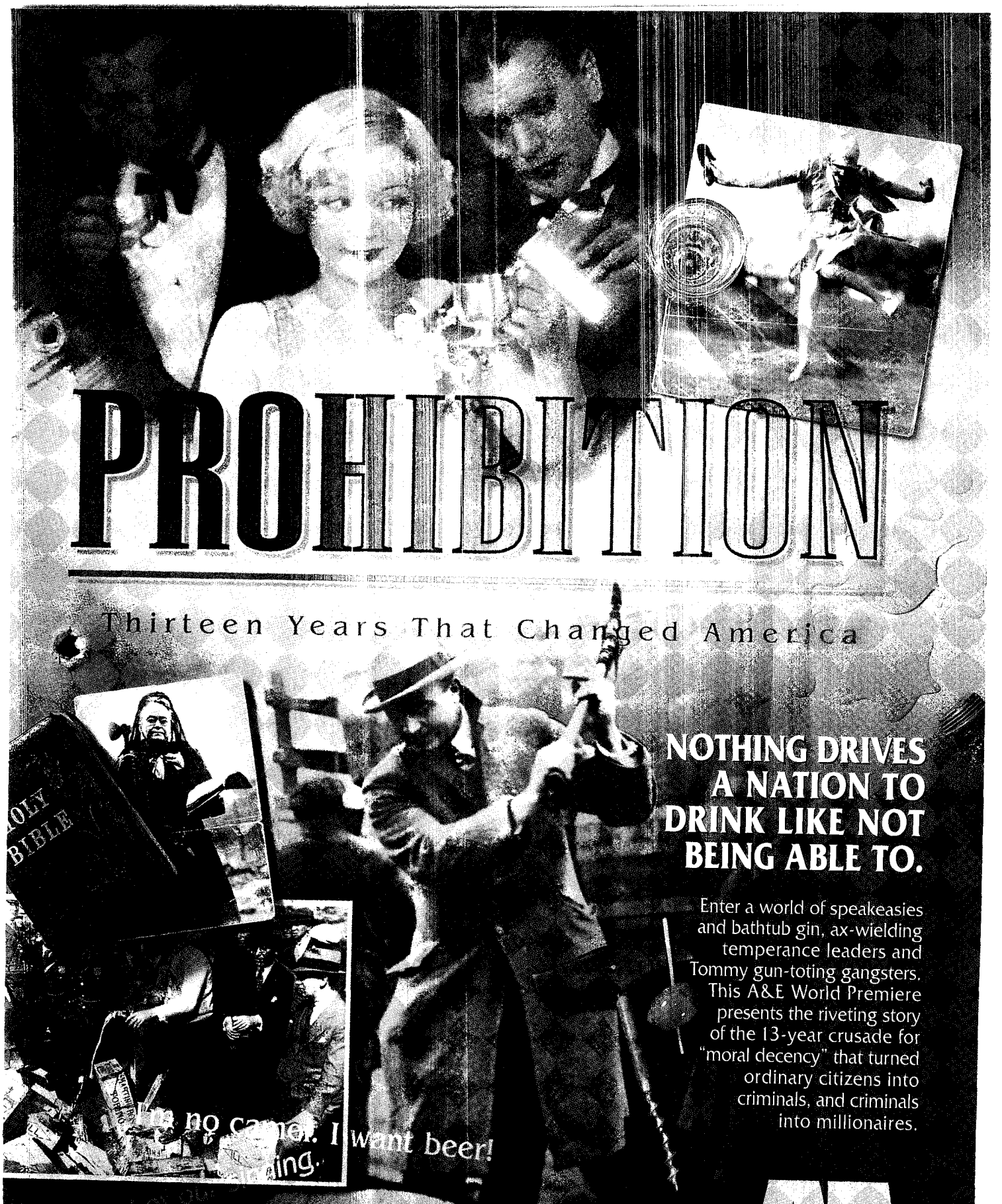

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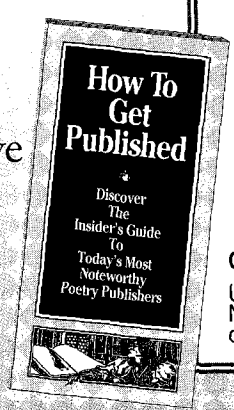

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perity, from oil profits and the free market, comes to the region.

BAKU, Azerbaijan's capital, hugs a crescent-shaped stretch of shoreline on the western edge of the Caspian Sea. Home to approximately two million people, the city rises up from the water and onto the adjacent hillside. Rusting hulks of oil tankers loom in the harbor, the best natural port on the Caspian. Hundreds of oil derricks sit idle in pools of black sludge along the city's southwestern shore, reminders of the country's unrealized economic potential. Strong winds often sluice powerfully up the city's streets—past the walled old city, built at the end of the sixteenth century, past the stately turn-of-the-century opera house and theater, and past monumental Stalinist office buildings. Clusters of communist-style apartment blocs cling to the semi-arid hillside, and shiny white satellite dishes, newly available, sprout from their balconies, like mushrooms growing rampant out of dying trees.

A walk through the streets of Baku today reveals an incongruous blend of old and new, East and West, socialist and capitalist, secular and religious. Peddlers arrange American cigarettes, soft drinks, and candy for sale in neat little piles on almost every street corner. Next to the pyramids of Marlboro cartons and Snickers bars are bottles (and *cans*, even) of Russian vodka, bottled water and kitchenware from Iran, tinned goods from Turkey, cheap calculators from Asia. Here the country's famous black caviar, fresh from the Caspian Sea and laughably inexpensive by Western standards, is less sought after than a more exotic delicacy: Hershey's Kisses. Western oil companies are setting up shop—bringing in computers, Land Rovers, portable telephones—while in the same neighborhoods mosques are being built or restored with funds from Turkish and Iranian Muslims. Billboards, awash in vivid reds and blues, arrest the eye at every turn with pictures of beautiful young American couples, vistas of the American West, views of the Manhattan skyline; they beckon consumers into the worlds of Lucky Strike, Marlboro, and Coca-Cola.

But nothing sums up Azerbaijan's current identity crisis better than the dizzying display of alphabets one finds in Baku and everywhere else in the country. Some of this display is a natural result of geography: Azerbaijan is a small Turkic nation of eight million people nestled among three much larger and more powerful countries (Russia, Iran, and Turkey), each of which writes its language in a different alphabet (Cyrillic, Arabic, and Latin). Azerbaijan has a long history of occupation by and involvement with all three countries; as a result, in shops, on vehicles, on television, and at newsstands one finds Russian, Persian, and Turkish, each written in its respective alphabet. It's a confusing hodgepodge.

What's most disorienting, though, is that the Azerbaijani language itself—a Turkic tongue very similar to that spoken in Turkey and related to those spoken in many parts of Central Asia—is found written in different alphabets. Newspapers have headlines in Latin letters, but almost all articles are printed in Cyrillic. (Again, it's all the same language; only the lettering is different.) Next to street names carved in Arabic script on the stone walls and houses of Baku's old city are those same names, on faded Soviet-era signs, written in Cyrillic. Bright new street signs in Latin letters are popping up everywhere, some put up by the government and some by individuals. The writing on paper money is all in the new Latin alphabet; vehicle license plates appear to be issued in Cyrillic or Latin letters at random; buses advertise their destinations sometimes in Cyrillic, sometimes in Latin, sometimes in both alphabets. The names on the doors of government ministries and universities are often printed in Latin characters, but the paperwork shuffled inside is for the most part still written in Cyrillic letters. Change is happening—and it isn't. Nobody seems to be in charge, or to know what's going on. Is the country Azərbaycan, Азәрбајчан, or آذربایجان?

"This question of alphabets," says Richard D. Kauzlarich, the U.S. ambassador to Azerbaijan, "is one aspect of the larger question Who are we?"

THE territory now known as Azerbaijan has long been subject to the imperial intentions of regional powers. Cyrus the Great, of Persia, invaded the area in the sixth century B.C. Alexander the Great came two centuries later, and Roman legions three centuries after that. The Arabs brought Islam—and the Arabic alphabet—to the region in the seventh century A.D., and in subsequent centuries the Persians and the Ottomans vied for influence there. By the nineteenth century the area was a pawn in the Great Game for territory and power played out by the Russian and Persian empires.

It was in the nineteenth century that Russia and other Western countries realized that Azerbaijan had bountiful petroleum reserves, and by the turn of the twentieth century Baku had become the world's largest producer and exporter of oil. Forced to the surface by abundant natural gas, oil was so plentiful (it is estimated that Azerbaijan's reserves rival Kuwait's) that it was easily extracted from shallow pits with buckets and pulleys. Profits made Baku a boomtown; the city soon reveled in music, theater, literature, and a grand architectural style imported from Europe.

To a degree unimaginable in the West, alphabets in Azerbaijan are politics, religion, and culture.

Azerbaijani scholars argue that the political entity now known as Azerbaijan has a distinct history that goes back perhaps as far as the sixth century B.C. Only under Soviet rule, however, did the name Azerbaijan attain widespread and official use—primarily as a pre-emptive Soviet move to discourage an emerging "pan-Turkic" movement among the peoples who inhabited the region stretching from present-day Europe and Turkey through Central Asia and into present-day China. Now that the Soviets are gone, Turkey and Iran—and Marlboro and Coca-Cola—are eagerly positioning themselves to fill the vacuum.

Azerbaijanis themselves would like to fill that vacuum, but the relentless march of occupiers through the region has left them little sense of themselves with which to be assertive. "We don't know anything about our country now—its history, its traditions, its language,"

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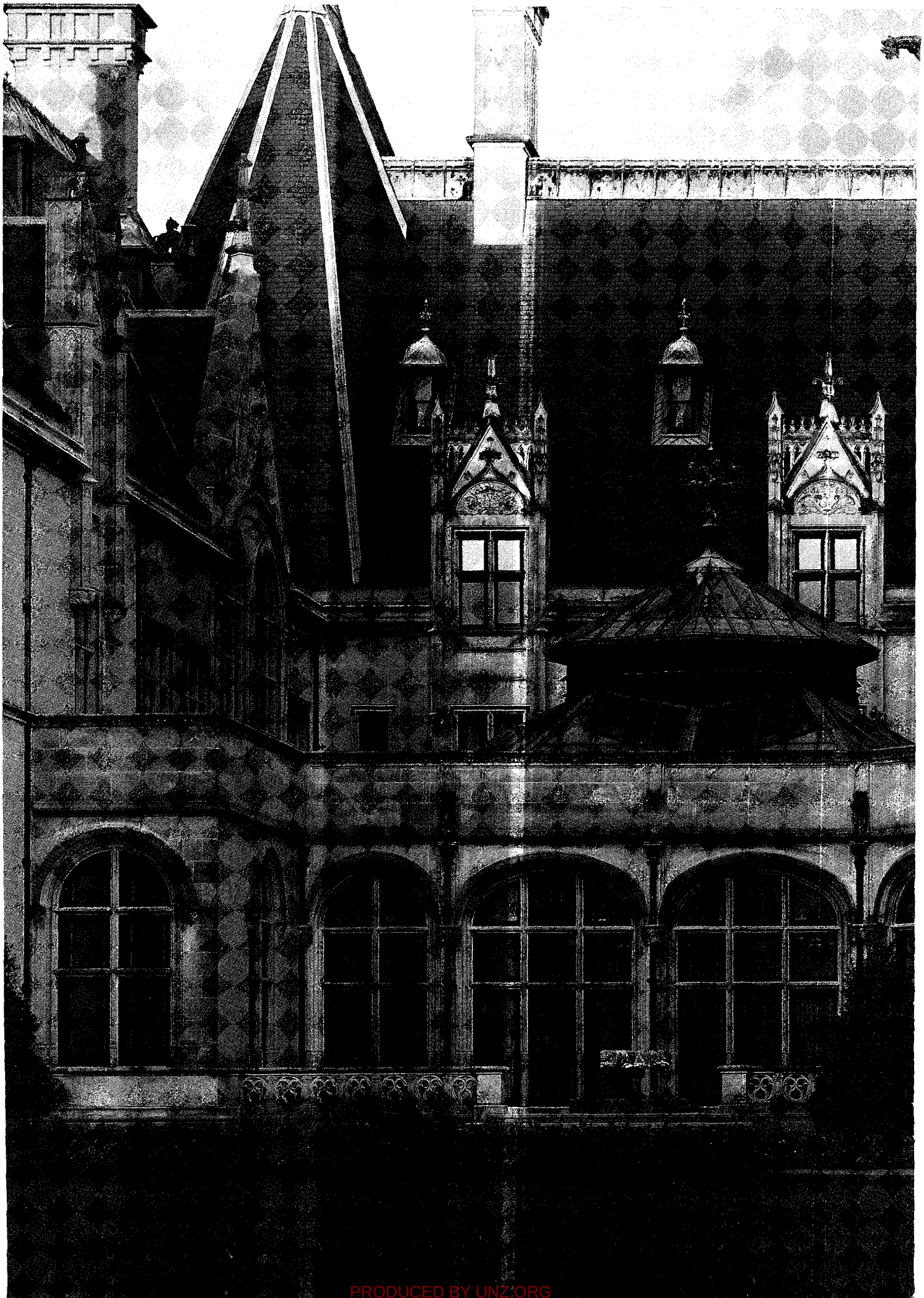

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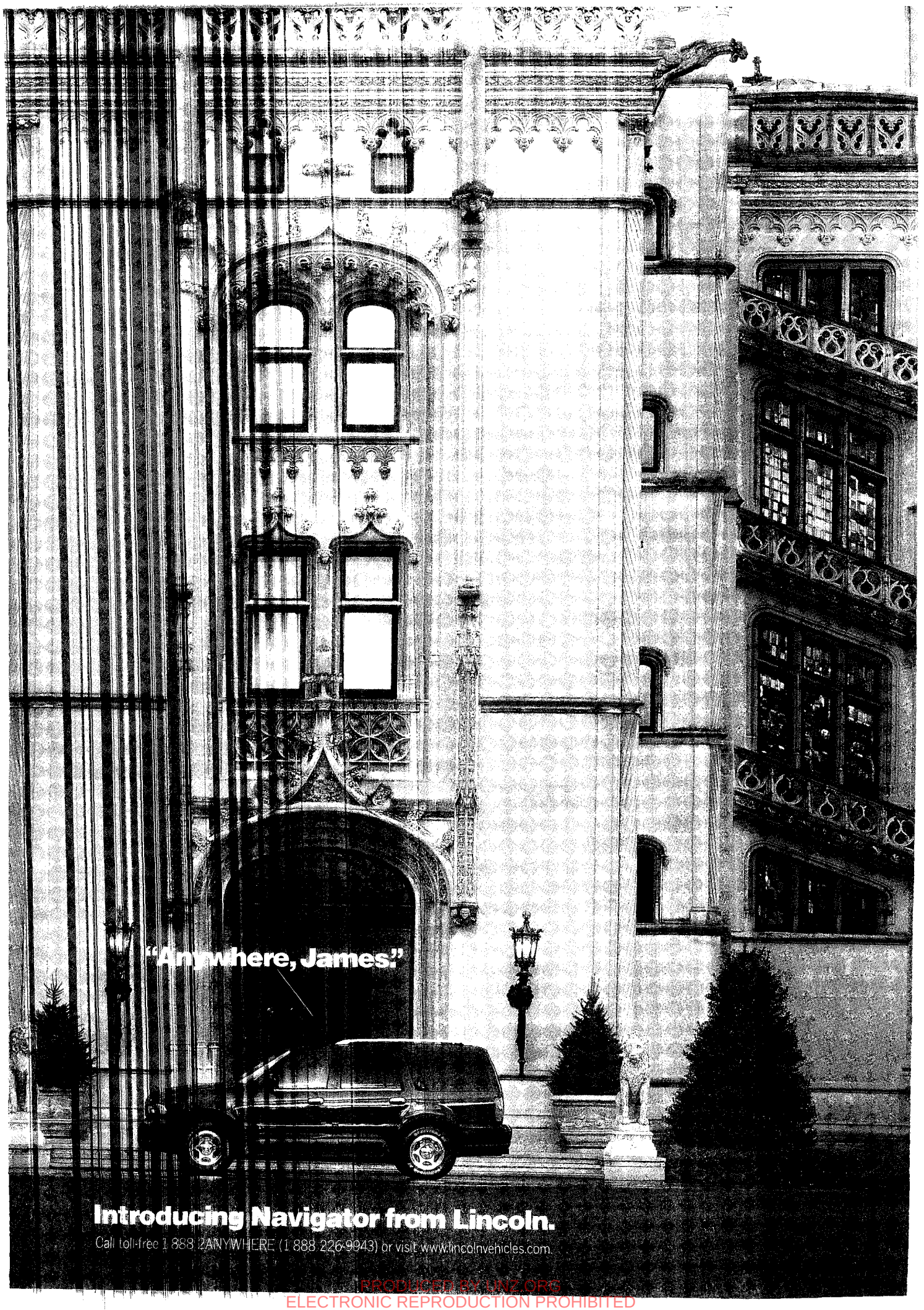

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says Shaig Safarov, a political activist turned oil-company employee. "For us it's just *wonderland*. We have to imagine everything."

In the 1920s the Soviet leadership in Moscow, taking sides in an existing debate within the Turkic republics of the USSR, had decreed that Azerbaijani, which had been written for centuries in Arabic script, would thenceforth be written exclusively in the Latin alphabet. The problems with the old Arabic script were clear; one of the most important was that the Turkic languages use eight vowels but the Arabic alphabet accommodates only three. Reading and writing were therefore tasks that required a formidable memory and tolerance for ambiguity. The Azerbaijani reforms provided a model for neighboring Turkey's famous transformation to its own variant of the Latin alphabet in 1928, but in 1939 Stalin decreed that all Turkic languages were to be written exclusively in the Cyrillic alphabet—a draconian measure designed to promote unity among Soviet republics and to isolate the Soviet Turkic republics from the recently latinized Turkey.

Not surprisingly, when the former Soviet republics gained independence, several of them decided to shed the Cyrillic alphabet. How better to break with more than seventy years of communist rule, the argument went, than by a drastic, immediately visible, and richly symbolic change? Why not free their languages from the shackles of the oppressive Cyrillic alphabet? Local journalists, picking up on the infectious nature of the movement, referred to the general euphoria as a symptom of "new-alphabet disease." Nowhere was the "disease" more virulent than in Azerbaijan, whose geographic position made for contentious debate inside and outside the country. National politicians and international diplomats lobbied aggressively for different alphabets.

Newspapers have headlines in Latin letters, but almost all articles are printed using Cyrillic ones.

"In these discussions," Shaig Safarov says, "the whole nation was involved. Whether we needed Cyrillic or Latin or Arabic: that was the favorite discussion. Accusations were everywhere about Turkish and Russian and Persian sympathies."

Leaflets printed in Iran appeared, urging Muslims to return to their religious and cultural roots by reviving the Arabic alphabet, which, it was noted, is the alphabet of the Koran. Several prominent Azerbaijani literary figures argued that a return to Arabic letters would give access to the hundreds of years' worth of Azerbaijani literature and scholarship from before the 1920s. Iranian clerics traveled around the country preaching about the dangerously secular interests of those—American and Israeli agents, some suggested—who were promoting the Latin alphabet.

At the same time, Turkish diplomats and entrepreneurs began to waft amiably into the country, sporting Western clothes and an almost irresistible aura of prosperity. They offered immediate donations of Latin-alphabet typewriters and textbooks and promised speedy integration with Turkey and the West—if only Azerbaijan would adopt the Turkish version of the Latin alphabet. "If we leave them alone," one Turkish diplomat warned at the time, "the Arabs and the Iranians will sway their minds." Pan-Turkists spoke rhapsodically of the economic and social benefits of a unified Latin alphabet and of a cultural bloc across Eurasia. Those with their eyes on free markets argued that use of the Latin alphabet would open up trade with the West. (Zealous reformers in Turkmenistan, possibly getting carried away by the Latin alphabet's financial promise, proposed that $ and ¢ be the upper- and lower-case letters for the "sh" sound.)

Russians, local Communists, and even cautious reformers in Azerbaijan argued that a hasty rejection of Cyrillic would only exacerbate an already painful transition. Why assume that a switch to the Latin alphabet was necessary to gain access to Western markets? The Japanese, the Koreans, the Israelis, and even the neighboring Armenians all seemed to be doing quite well without making that particular concession.

Nevertheless, on December 25, 1991, the Azerbaijani parliament passed a decree (written in Cyrillic letters) mandating a switch from the Cyrillic alphabet—which the decree referred to as a "historical injustice" introduced "despite the people's will" and as a "continuation of the mass repressions of the 1930s"—to a thirty-two-letter Latin alphabet. Firudin Jalilov, at the time a progressive member of the National Assembly and one of the leaders of the specially created Latin Alphabet Commission, explained the decision. "Our concern was to disconnect us from Russia and to connect us with the Latin alphabet used in the West."

Debate raged on, however. According to Shaig Safarov and others, the National Assembly spent days in January of 1992 arguing exclusively about the letter used to render the most common sound in the language (the *a* sound in *hat*)—which, according to the December decree, was to be *ä*. Should the letter remain *ä*, with its cumbersome dots, in line with what had been proposed in other Turkic republics? What about simply *e*, as Turkey had it? A practical solution would be the letter *ə*, used in the Azerbaijani variant of the Cyrillic alphabet to represent the sound. It would be immediately familiar to everybody and at the same time would distinguish the Azerbaijani Latin alphabet from others. But was it too heavily invested with Cyrillic, and thus imperial Russian, connotations? Safarov claims that behind the scenes progressives and Communists in the Azerbaijani parliament bartered political appointments for an acceptable form of the new letter. In the end a decree was issued changing *ä* to *ə*. "I was struggling for our little letter *ə*," Safarov says. "It differentiates us from all other languages."

After the switch of alphabets "Russian people living in Azerbaijan were *so* frustrated," says Solmaz Aliyeva, an Azerbaijani interpreter. That was, of course, part of the point. More potently than any other single reform, the new alphabet symbolized the birth of a new order and the death of the old—just as Turkey's change in 1928 clearly demonstrated to the world that the Turkish government was casting off Muslim and Ottoman history and lighting out for the secular West. Azerbaijan's decision to create a unique and independent Azerbaijani Latin alphabet not only signified a shifting of al-

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legiances and a rejection of Russian and Iranian influence; it also marked a new consolidation of national identity.

In some ways Turkey had an easier job with its alphabet reform than Azerbaijan has today. The literacy rate in Turkey in the 1920s was less than 10 percent; thus most of the population didn't have an old alphabet to unlearn. One of the positive aspects of the ambiguous legacy left by the Soviet Union to its former republics is almost universal literacy; the result is that changing alphabets now affects entire populations whose working lives depend on the ability to read.

Following through on the alphabet decision is a hugely expensive and complicated proposition. Converting textbooks, newspapers, and magazines to the new alphabet requires new printing presses. People have to be trained to operate them. New government documents, money, stamps, and license plates—to mention just a few of the most obvious components of a society—have to be issued. Reference materials of all sorts—medical, legal, historical, literary—have to be converted. In a part of the world where shortages (particularly of cash) are unending, trying to finance such projects seems quixotic.

Beyond the financial and logistical difficulties are the psychological ones. "You have to change your *brain*," Solmaz Aliyeva says. Educators must be trained to read and write in the new alphabet; only then can they teach it to students. Textbooks printed in the new alphabet have to be made universally available. David Nissman, a U.S. expert on Azerbaijan, points out another aggravation: "It's given them *terrible* handwriting." Different generations now read and write in different alphabets, and a divide is opening up that can make letter writing or even simple household notes ("Please pick up yogurt and a can of vodka—Love, Dad") an ordeal. Children learning the new Latin alphabet sometimes bewilder their parents and teachers by writing *Russian* in Latin letters. Decades' worth of mostly scientific Russian loan words that have crept into Azerbaijani must now be rendered in the new Latin letters.

Azerbaijanis in all walks of life, when asked for an opinion, tend to rally behind the cause of the Latin alphabet, but when pressed to reveal the alphabet they currently use to read and write Azerbaijani, most people shrug and smile (revealing one of the country's secret economic resources: huge reserves of gold teeth) and admit that they use Cyrillic. Either too much of their lives has been spent reading in the Cyrillic alphabet, or their efforts to seek out texts in the Latin alphabet are unavailing. Naturally, children now learning the new alphabet in elementary schools are the most comfortable with the change. Some of the few Azerbaijanis who have computers have access to software programs that allow them to write in Cyrillic letters and then, with a single keystroke, convert the text into Latin letters.

In the absence of a magical keystroke that would allow people mentally to adapt to a new alphabet, progress is bound to be slow. The present government, led by Heydar Aliyev, a former chief of the Azerbaijani KGB and member of the Soviet Politburo, has turned its attention away from alphabets to more-pressing problems: the conflict with Armenia over the disputed enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh, which has brought about an influx of almost a million refugees into Azerbaijan; relations with Russia, whose looming presence still overshadows Turkey's; and drilling rights in the Caspian Sea. Many members of the zealously pro-Turkish and pro-Western Popular Front that passed the alphabet decree in 1991 have been removed from power. The new government remains at least officially committed to the new alphabet, but many now in positions of power prefer to write Azerbaijani in Cyrillic letters—and often prefer to speak Russian.

Ahmad Abdinov, a vice-minister of education, who is charged with implementing the new alphabet in Azerbaijani schools, was clearly ambivalent about his assignment when we met in his office. After blandly and dutifully reporting the number of textbooks he had managed to convert to the Latin alphabet (149), he sighed and leaned back from his desk, which was littered with Azerbaijani documents written in Cyrillic. Speaking (in Russian, not Azerbaijani) with a candor and sincerity remarkable for an official responsible for his government's reforms, he said, "The process has been rushed; it will be a big loss. Not only our own literature, but lots of important world literature—Dreiser, Maupassant, Jack London—has all been translated into Azerbaijani using Cyrillic, not Latin, letters. If we teach in the universities in the Latin alphabet, it won't be 'higher education.'" Abdinov is clearly daunted by the prospect of wholesale change as he contemplates the national predicament. "It's as though we have been in a dark room for a long time, and suddenly have come out into the light. We can't see."

A legal decree: the Cyrillic alphabet is a "continuation of the mass repressions of the 1930s."

Notwithstanding economic hardship and foot-dragging by the former Communists who are again in power, the change to the Latin alphabet seems inevitable—especially if alphabets do indeed follow trade, as one historical theory proposes. Turkish restaurants are opening, and supermarkets that stock expensive bottles of Evian and bars of Toblerone chocolate are springing up in Baku. British and Turkish airlines now fly into Baku regularly. CNN and Rupert Murdoch's Sky Channel, via satellite, beam in hourly news in English—along with episodes of *Cops*, *Baywatch*, and *The Simpsons*. Russian goods and services, although still omnipresent, are thought of as second-rate, and Iranian products are generally scoffed at. ("Iranian bags!" I heard one Azerbaijani vendor mutter when a bag of cherries he was selling burst open. "What do you expect?") Most important, oil money, lots of it, is expected to arrive soon, mainly from Western exploration and drilling.

Azerbaijan will not emerge from more than seven decades of Soviet rule—and centuries of occupation—simply by decreeing a change of alphabets. It's a nation with multiple identities and no identity, where contradictory forces still contend for influence in realms that in most of the West constitute the stable building blocks of society. But deciding that some of those blocks should be labeled A, B, C—rather than A, Б, В or أ, ب, ت—represents a start.

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Visitations

The graveyards of a lifetime

by Gerald Dumas

I AM drawn to cemeteries. I've enjoyed them since childhood. I have no wish to be placed in one anytime soon, of course, but I am lured by their green serenity, riveted by all those shimmering echoes.

My wife found out about this unconventional streak quite early in our marriage. We did not know each other all that well to begin with; we decided to hook up forever more or less on instinct. And so thirty-six years ago we got married in Phoenix and set out on our honeymoon driving cross-country to our new home—my old apartment, actually—in Connecticut.

We drove north to Oak Creek Canyon and the Grand Canyon, and then, before she knew what hit her, I had her standing beside me looking reverently down at the grave of my boyhood hero, Buffalo Bill, in the foothills outside Denver. We had had only seven or eight dates before our marriage, dates that were spaced well apart but pretty good dates—dinner, wine, movies, walks, all the pleasant and ordinary sorts of behavior. So she had no reason to suspect me of anything unusual until I dragged her a good many miles out of our way to gaze upon the ground beneath which lay the bones of Buffalo Bill. I remember standing there with head bowed, eyes closed, seeing clearly in my mind's eye Joel McCrea in one of his best roles, and looking up finally to find Gail studying me curiously. We made good time going across the country, considering that highways were not what they are today, and less than a week later found us in Elmira, New York, staring reverently down at the grave of Mark Twain. I had gotten Gail to say yes to me during the course of a whirlwind weekend in New York City—the top of the Empire State Building, moonlight carriage ride in Central Park, selecting an engagement ring at Black, Starr & Gorham, on Fifth Avenue. Yet here we were in another cemetery on our honeymoon, and she was beginning to get concerned.

"Look," I said to her, pointing. "Susy Clemens's grave. She was only twenty-four years old." I bent down a little and read aloud the inscription beneath her name:

> "Warm summer sun shine
> kindly here,
> Warm Southern wind blow
> gently here,
> Green sod above lie light,
> lie light—
> Good night, dear heart,
> good night, good night."

Tears came to my eyes; I turned away, so Gail couldn't see, and found myself face-to-face with two elderly women. One of them said to me, with some anxiety, "Are you all right?"

"I'm fine," I said. "I'm on my honeymoon."

Illustration by Blair Drawson

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" . . . *well*, I've been enjoying a conversation with Cynthia Ozick, debating Peter Edelman on 'The Worst Thing Bill Clinton Has Done'—oh, and Robert Pinsky read me a poem last night."

"My! I had no idea you kept such fascinating company."

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We left the cemetery fairly quickly then, but just before we got to the gate, I looked back and saw that the women were still looking at us. At me, anyway.

WHEN I was a child, I spent a great deal of time in Mount Olivet Cemetery in Detroit, because that's where all my father's side of the family kept being buried. My father was the second youngest of seventeen children, and by the time he was about forty, his mother and father had been conducted to their graves, and after decent intervals Uncle Ed and Uncle Harold and Aunt Emma and Aunt Philomene and all the others had followed. (Incidentally, old Joe Dumas, the father of the seventeen, for having sired that brood once won a box of Havana cigars in some strange contest involving a local newspaper; his wife, my grandmother Louisa, a hearty Jane Darwell sort, won nothing.)

I looked forward to all those funerals, because I liked the look of the cemetery, with its calm, endless rolling hills, all the gravestones, the weeping willows, and the ponds, so different from the scraggly, screeching, monotonous streets that encircled it. And I liked to listen to and watch all the survivors as they got into and out of cars grimly and ate the ham and drank the beer thoughtfully and quietly, so different from their everyday selves. Normally my aunts and uncles were fairly excitable—some would even say rowdy.

But my favorite cemetery in the world is the one in Conestogo, Ontario, where my mother's parents lived, my Opa and Oma. Saint Matthew's Church is on a high point in the middle of the village, and the cemetery spreads out right alongside. Summer after summer we would come for a few weeks, and I, weird kid that I was turning out to be, tended to hang out with the oldest men I could find. They all seemed to have been around forever, and I wanted to study their faces and listen to their strange and wonderful voices and find out what they knew. Old Marty and Charlie Schweitzer would let me play in their ancient, aromatic barn and hold the reins of their huge horses, Mike and Prince, from high atop the haywagon, and would stuff me with raspberries and molasses cookies and give me baskets filled with turnips and beets to take home to Oma.

Then came a summer when Marty was dead, and another summer when Charlie was dead. I would run to the cemetery, run wildly between the gravestones, and stop at the foot of Marty's and Charlie's graves to tell them that I missed them and to wonder what they looked like now. Then I would sit on their stones and swing my bare legs and chew Doublemint gum and wait for the bells in the steeple to ring, which is what Marty and Charlie and I used to do when we worked in the fields together, down by the river.

SINCE then I have been in cemeteries everywhere—Boston and London, the great cemeteries of Paris. We have some very fine graveyards here in my Connecticut town, filled with good old names like Josiah Finch, Abigail Goodtree, and Hezekial Mead. The former pastor of the little white Congregational church a stone's throw from our house was named Nathan Adams, and a tall, gaunt, sweet man he was. He died not long ago, and I saw him in his coffin, at the front of the church, just beneath the pulpit. He was widely loved: the next day the small church could not begin to hold everybody, and I was out on the lawn with many others. They took him off to be buried, and I went to find my wife, who was working, to see if she could come to the cemetery. She could not join me; it may be that she's had enough of all this. So I sped off to catch the last of the burial.

I was too late. Most people were just leaving. I parked and went over to the grave site and started talking to a man in a blue serge suit. We looked down at the green fake-grass fabric that covered the grave. Others drifted over to listen to us. We spoke about what a good, kind person he was, and how he would be missed.

Finally I said, "What's that bulge there under the covering?"

My companion said, "Why, that's the urn with the ashes."

I said, "I just saw Nate Adams yesterday. He wasn't cremated."

The blue serge suit said, "Nate who? This is Bill Gilman, from Westport."

I got in my car and drove away. They all watched me go.

That keeps happening, but it's all right. Someday it'll stop.

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SPECIAL
SUMMER
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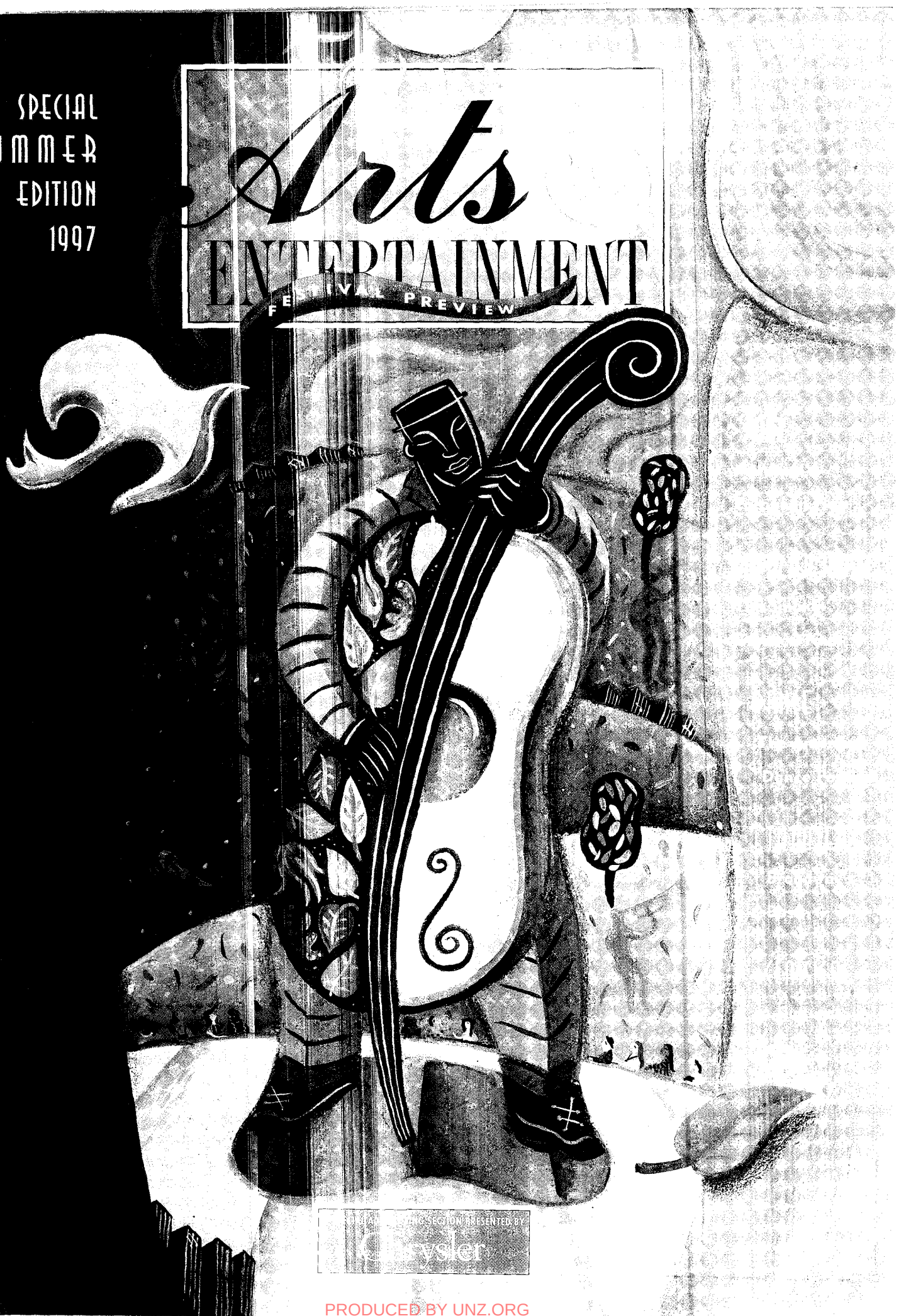
1997

Arts ENTERTAINMENT

FESTIVAL PREVIEW



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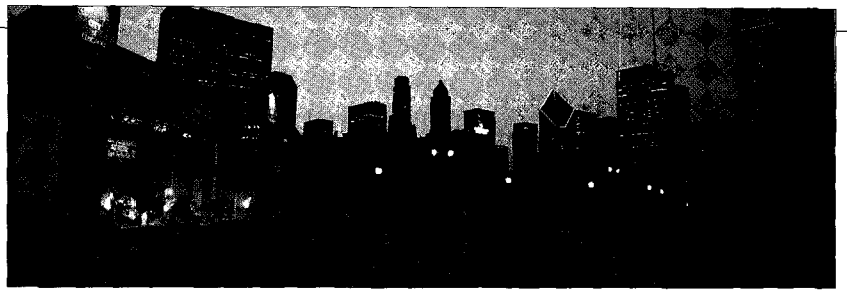
SUMMER 97 POPULAR MUSIC AND JAZZ

BY BOB BLUMENTHAL AND CHARLES M. YOUNG



JAVET M. KIMBLE

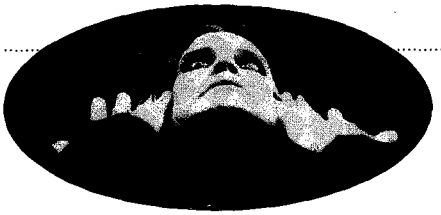
THE CITY THAT DELIVERS THE STARS

Sometimes Chicago enjoys a pennant race on Labor Day weekend, but the Chicago Jazz Festival (August 28–31; 312-744-3370) has been a sure thing for nineteen years.

This totally free event has a lot going for it besides the accommodating Petrillo Music Shell and the city's imposing skyline. The programming skill of the respected Jazz Institute of Chicago ensures that jazz from all eras and all corners of the world will be heard. This year, in addition to such stars as Illinois Jacquet and Billy Taylor, the Australian alto saxophonist Bernie McGann and the French-gypsy guitar duo of Boulou and Elios Ferre will receive their first significant American exposure. A tribute to Detroit jazz will include Betty Carter, Tommy Flanagan, and Kenny Burrell; Chicago will also honor its own, with a special set celebrating the seventy-fifth birthday of the tenor-sax legend Von Freeman.

Seating is open for the festival's four late-afternoon concerts, where crowds historically pay equal attention to classicists, represented this year by the cornetist Ruby Braff, and to innovators, such as Myra Melford and her band The Same River Twice. "Jazz on Jackson" events featuring local musicians and special guests on a contiguous Grant Park stage provide more music on Saturday and Sunday in the afternoon. The truly insatiable can also take in the late-night club action, where festival stars often sit in and do their best to see that the music never stops. **—B.B.**

MEGATOURS



DEAN CARR

The iron man, Ozzy Osbourne

For all the talk of "electronica" (computer and synthesizer weirdness) being the next big thing, the truly monster tour of the summer promises to be that old reliable heavy metal, in the form of the Ozzfest (May 24–June 29). Headlined by Ozzy Osbourne, reuniting with his Black Sabbath bandmates Tony Iommi and Geezer Butler (but not Bill Ward), the Ozzfest is modeled after Lollapalooza, with a full day and two stages of pagan rites at high decibels. Ozzy will perform his own full-length set and then cap the evening with the heaviest of all reunions. In a nice juxtaposition of classic and current horror metal, Pantera and Marilyn Manson will split the dates in the second slot—if local authorities don't try to force Manson off the bill, as happened at Giants Stadium in New Jersey. Other main-stage bands include Machine Head, Fear Factory, Type O Negative, and Powerman 5000.

If you prefer your day of rock to be more mixed in style, the Lollapalooza tour (running from mid-June to mid-August) offers a lineup ranging from retro avant-garde (Devo) to electronica (Orbital) to rap (Snoop Doggy Dogg) to metal (Tool). Other acts even less amenable to labeling include the Jon Spencer Blues Explosion, Julian and Damian Marley and the Uprising Band, Korn, and Tricky.

If you're more funk-oriented, the House of Blues is sponsoring its second Smokin' Grooves Tour (June 30–August 24), co-headlined by George Clinton with the P-Funk All-Stars and Cypress Hill. Erykah Badou, the Roots, and Foxy Brown fill out the bill. You will also see one of the following in the opening slot: Outkasts, Brand New Heavies, or Pharcyde. **—C.M.Y.**

CAPITOL RECORDS

George Clinton

LA GRANDE DAME

Some fans jokingly refer to Montreal as the home of the best American jazz festival, although it would be just as accurate to refer to Festival International de Jazz de Montreal as North America's most European event—not only because of the French spoken in Quebec but also because of the respect shown, by both producers and diverse audiences, for all styles of jazz.

The 18th annual Montreal festival (June 26–July 6; 888-515-0515) will, as usual, be centered in the city's Place des Arts/Complexe Desjardins. Ten indoor clubs and concert halls plus nine outdoor stages offer more than three dozen performances, mostly free, daily from noon until midnight. Among the many family-oriented events is a musical revue held at the Montreal Casino.

Although blues and world music have a significant place and their own outdoor stages, jazz is always the main event at the

CAROLINE HAVEUR

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Montreal festival. In addition to such stars as Herbie Hancock, John McLaughlin, and Jackie McLean, the program includes special events. The nine concerts of the "Piano Piano" series pair major keyboard players from around the world, including Geri Allen, Gonzalo Rubalcaba, Matial Solal, and Renee Rosmes. In the "Invitational" series both the guitarist Bill Frisell and the trombonist Ray Anderson will work with a different ensemble each night. And the "Grand Evénement," on Tuesday, July 1, a well-kept secret until festival time, will bring the entire festival audience together for one spectacular performance. Last year more than 125,000 fans gathered to hear the New Orleans trumpeters Nicholas Payton and Leroy Jones celebrate Louis Armstrong. **—B.B.**

Bob Blumenthal is a jazz critic for The Boston Globe.
Charles M. Young reviews popular music for Playboy, Musician, *and other publications.*

COVER ILLUSTRATION BY ELIZABETH ROSEN

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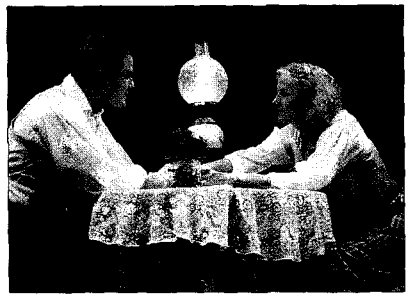
SUMMER 97 DANCE AND THEATER

BY AUSTIN BAER AND NANCY DALVA

MUCH ADO ABOUT BROADWAY

You want Broadway to be a mob scene at showtime, and it is, especially now. As of late April thirty-four shows were running, setting a record for the past ten years. My best-everything vote goes to *A Doll's House,* Henrik Ibsen's pitiless anatomy of a marriage, imported from London for a limited run ending July 26. In photographs the revival would no doubt look like a scrupulous period recreation. In the theater what registers is a quality of truthfulness, a sense that the drama is being not interpreted but rather revealed. For noble reasons, Nora Helmer has forged a signature on a loan document. As the curtain rises, she is dancing as fast as she can, keeping current with her payments and maintaining, at incalculable personal cost, a façade of giddy domestic bliss. There are other ways to approach the role, but for the time being Janet McTeer's brave, breathless performance renders comparison irrelevant. As drama William Luce's *Barrymore* ranks somewhat below Ibsen, but as a pretext for extreme acting by Christopher Plummer this one-man impression of the late matinee idol does the job handily. Unseen at press time, the worthy contender Stockard Channing bares her fangs as Regina in Lillian Hellman's *The Little Foxes,* challenging the celluloid ghost of Bette Davis. (For tickets to all these plays call 212-239-6200.) For further proof that happy Broadway days are here again, look in on *Forbidden Broadway Strikes Back!,* at the Triad on the Upper West Side (212-799-4599). It seems like only yesterday that Gerald Alessandrini's long-running spoof had to close for lack of inspiration downtown. Now it's back with a vengeance, well stocked with fresh material such as "Shall We Boink" (baring the subtext of *The King and I*) and *Master Class,* with Patti LuPone's Maria Callas giving the business to *Sunset Boulevard*'s Glenn Close and *Evita*'s Madonna. You don't need to have seen the originals to get all the jokes (who saw *State Fair*?), but sometimes it helps. The relentless twenty-minute parody of *Rent,* however, is about as funny as the real thing. **—A.B.**



JOAN MARCUS

Janet McTeer in *A Doll's House*

Forbidden Broadway

LOIS GREENFIELD

The Paul Taylor Dance Company

AFOOT IN AMERICA

I love to go to performances in the summer, when the days are long and the sky turns white before it turns black. You go in, and it is day; you depart, and it is night, velvety and magical. Outdoors, better yet, you can watch that most beautiful time of day, dusk, and see the stars come out over the dancers. The grand old ladies of dance festivals are the American Dance Festival, in Durham, North Carolina (June 12–July 26; 919-684-4444), and Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival, in Becket, Massachusetts (June 24–August 24; 413-243-0745). Both have terrific offerings this year: at ADF the companies of Paul Taylor and Trisha Brown are best bets, and Pilobolus is the perennial favorite; at the Pillow, I recommend especially the companies of Mark Morris, Merce Cunningham, and Elizabeth Streb. Out west are two Colorado festivals: DanceAspen (July 1–August 23; 970-925-8400, with Paul Taylor again the hot ticket, and other companies ranging from Martha Graham to the National Ballet of Caracas) and the Colorado Dance Festival, in Boulder (July 6–August 3; 303-442-7666). Other notable events include the Huntington Summer Arts Festival, on Long Island (June 20–August 17; 516-271-8442), the Maine Festival, at Thompson's Point Beach, near Brunswick (July 31–August 3; 207-772-9012), and the Arts Festival of Atlanta (September 5–21; 404-885-1125). **—N.D.**

CAROL ROSEGG

Brown's company

CHRIS CALLIS

A STELLAR PERFORMANCE IN PRINT

Even among the most fervid performance addicts there are those who consider the ideal summer art to be the proper placement of a hammock, and the entertainment of choice to be a book. I have on my desk the perfect volume for balletomanes and balletophobes alike: Julie Kavanagh's *Secret Muses,* a biography of Sir Frederick Ashton, the great English choreographer. Kavanagh—whose marvelous gifts include a wily grasp of the novelist's narrative devices—conveys her profound scholarly knowledge of Ashton (whom she knew late in his life, and whose papers she supplemented with a truly staggering amount of research) in a beautiful, decidedly English manner. Part social history, cultural history, dance history, collection of letters, and photo album, *Secret Muses* is, against all odds, a real page-turner. At the beginning of the book I thought I had fallen into Trollope (as when Kavanagh describes Ashton's mother as "a pretty girl from Wooky Hole"); by the end, where Sir Fred is tangoing with the Queen Mother, I had segued into Angela Thirkell territory, so clearly marked by both sentiment and wit. Only now, in telling about it, have I realized that Kavanagh's style is, in fact, a dead ringer for Ashton's own. **—N.D.**

PHOTOGRAPH: LEE MILLER; DESIGN: MEGAN WILSON

Austin Baer is a writer based in New York. Nancy Dalva is working on a series of essays on Merce Cunningham.

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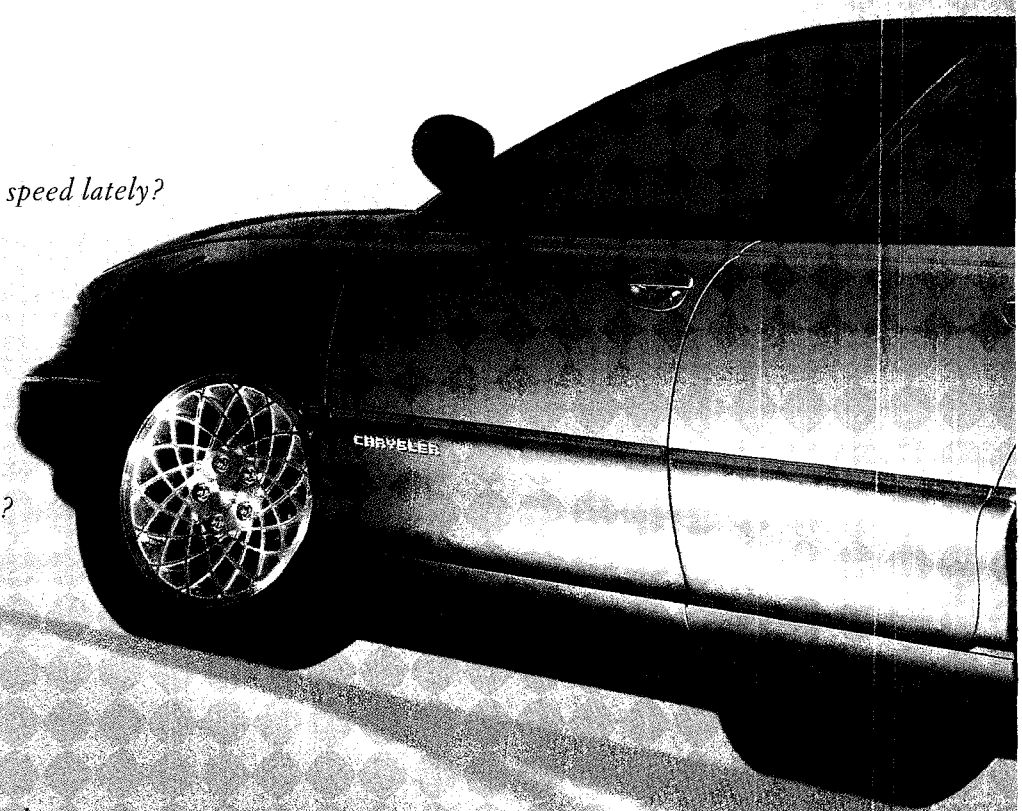

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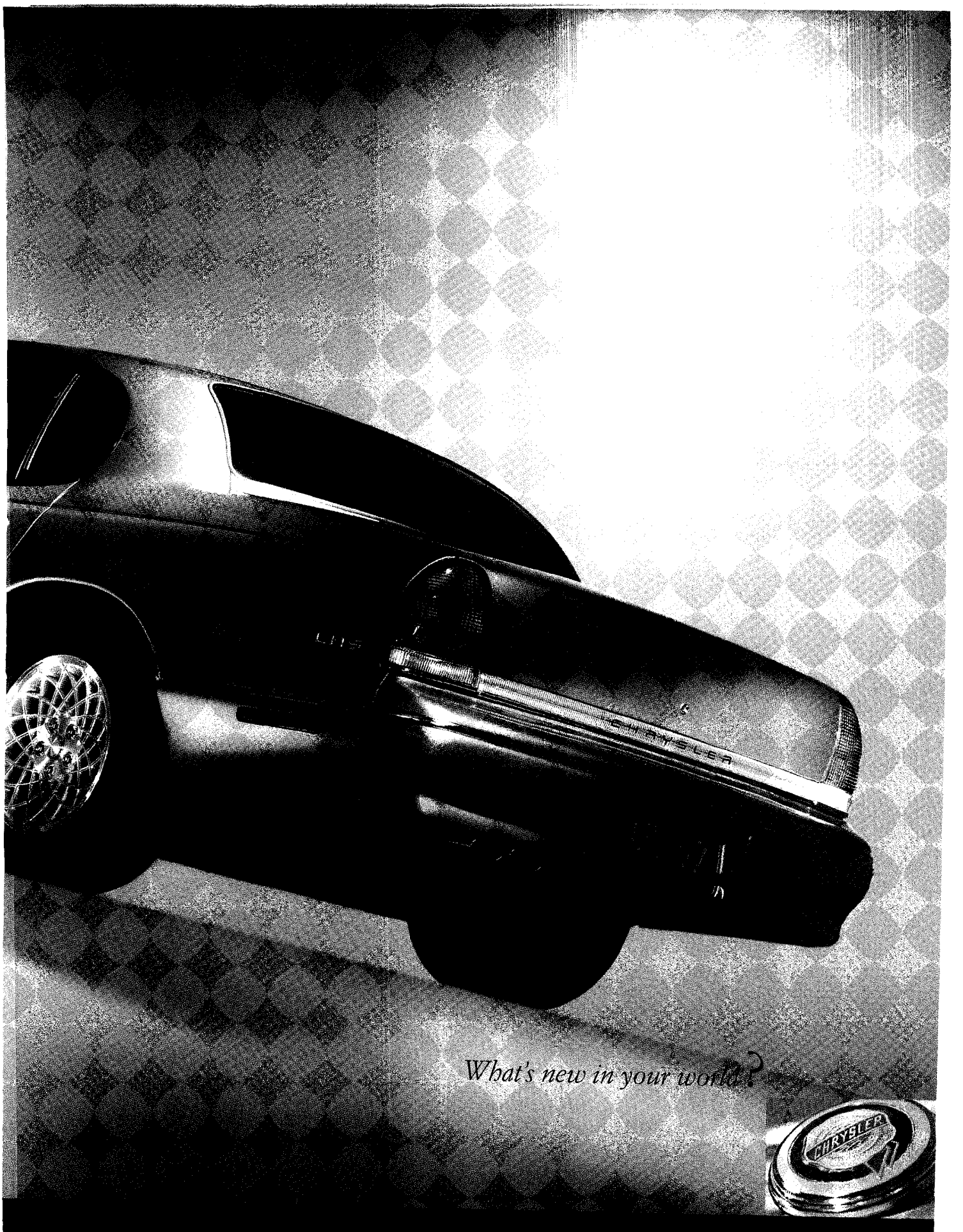

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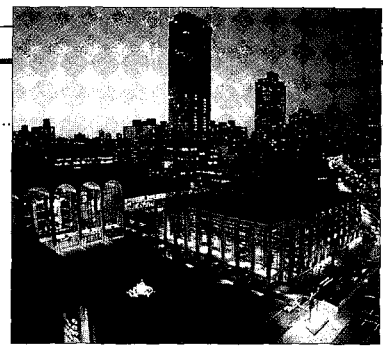
SUMMER 97 CLASSICAL MUSIC

BY AUSTIN BAER



STEPHANIE BERGER

THE LINCOLN CENTER FESTIVAL 97

Festival '96 Gives Itself a Preliminary Grade: A-Plus." So read the headline in *The New York Times* last August when the final curtain rang down on Lincoln Center's brave new bash. In three jam-packed weeks 83,000-plus paying customers had sampled sixty-four music, dance, and theatrical attractions that ranged from the exalted to the exasperating, the fabulous to the fatuous, the grand to the grandiose. Maybe the grade should have been an A-minus. In the final accounting ticket sales fell some 2,000 units and $300,000 below conservative projections. Still, John Rockwell, the former *Times* arts critic turned impresario, had proved that the public was hungry not just for light classics on the Great Lawn or Shakespeare under the stars but for an international cultural bazaar on the order of the standard-setting Salzburg and Edinburgh. The decision of the powers that be at Lincoln Center to extend their commitment to the festival through the year 2000 cannot have been hard to reach. Now Rockwell faces the challenge of his first encore, which needs to spark the same excitement as last year's festival, by new means (July 8–27; for more information call 212-875-5928).

PALESTRINA PLUS

BILL COOPER

The Prince of the Pagodas

The crown jewel in the festival's musical component is the first-ever joint visit to the United States by London's Royal Opera, Covent Garden, and its sister troupe, the Royal Ballet. True music lovers rarely attend ballet for musical pleasure, but Benjamin Britten's *Prince of the Pagodas* (July 18, 19, 29), afflicted with book problems, is blessed with a gorgeous score one encounters all too rarely. The unlikely operatic contribution is no less unusual: the anti-modernist cult item *Palestrina* (1917), by Hans Pfitzner, which makes its point by way of doctrinal quarrels within the sixteenth-century Catholic Church over the use of polyphony in sacred music (July 21, 24, 26). This summer's performances, featuring a top-drawer cast led by the masterly Christian Thielemann, should make the most compelling case for the score that we are likely to encounter for many a season. The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center offers an all-Pfitzner evening (July 23), while two programs devoted to Wagnerism and its countercurrents, by the New York Philharmonic under Kurt Masur, put his aesthetic into a broader context (July 12, 14, 19, 20). Meanwhile, for those who prefer to click on sixteenth-century Italian polyphony, two evenings are scheduled with the early-music ensemble Pomerium (July 20, 27).

FROM BEOWULF TO SYMPHONIC JAZZ

MATTHIAS HORN

A Mozart opera, solo

Adventure on the cutting edge is promised with the world premiere of *Intimate Immensity*, by the living legend Morton Subotnick, which features the vocalists Joan La Barbara and Thomas Buckner (icons of the avant-garde in their own right), not to mention a pair of Yamaha Disklaviers, which are controlled electronically by the movements of an angel, embodied on this occasion by the Balinese dancer I Nyoman Wenten, performing in the ancestral style (July 16, 18, 19). Overriding conventional boundaries, Ornette Coleman's *Skies of America* integrates the jazz great's own octet Prime Time into the symphonic textures of the New York Philharmonic (July 8, 9). No festival is complete without its lunatic fringe. *The Solo Magic Flute* promises exactly what the title says. Starting with the overture, the tenor Christoph Homberger sings the entire score of Mozart's Masonic mystery by himself, unaccompanied. At least Homberger has an invisible partner: the director Herbert Wernicke, responsible lately for some of Europe's most stimulating opera productions (July 14, 16, 17, 18). Then there is Benjamin Bagby, whose seraphic medieval ensemble, Sequentia, climbed the charts with songs by the visionary Hildegard von Bingen. Accompanying himself on the harp, he chants—in the original Old English (which for all practical purposes might as well be Old Norse or contemporary Hungarian)—episodes from *Beowulf*. Prick up your ears for the part when the brawny hero goes mano a mano with the monster Grendel and rips Grendel's arm clear out of its socket (July 20, 21).

Austin Baer is a writer based in New York.

BREAKFAST with THE ARTS

Start your Sunday morning off right, with the arts. On July 13 on the A&E Network you can see the remarkable story of a piano prodigy who grew into this century's last great player in the Romantic tradition. Beginning at 9:00 A.M., the two-hour program details the life of Jorge Bolet. Born in Cuba, Bolet won his first scholarship to study piano in the United States at age twelve. He later became one of the most well-known players of Liszt.

Chrysler is the proud sponsor of *Breakfast With the Arts* on the A&E Network and of the Arts & Entertainment Preview. This Special Summer Edition concludes our season, but we will return in the fall with more outstanding arts coverage.

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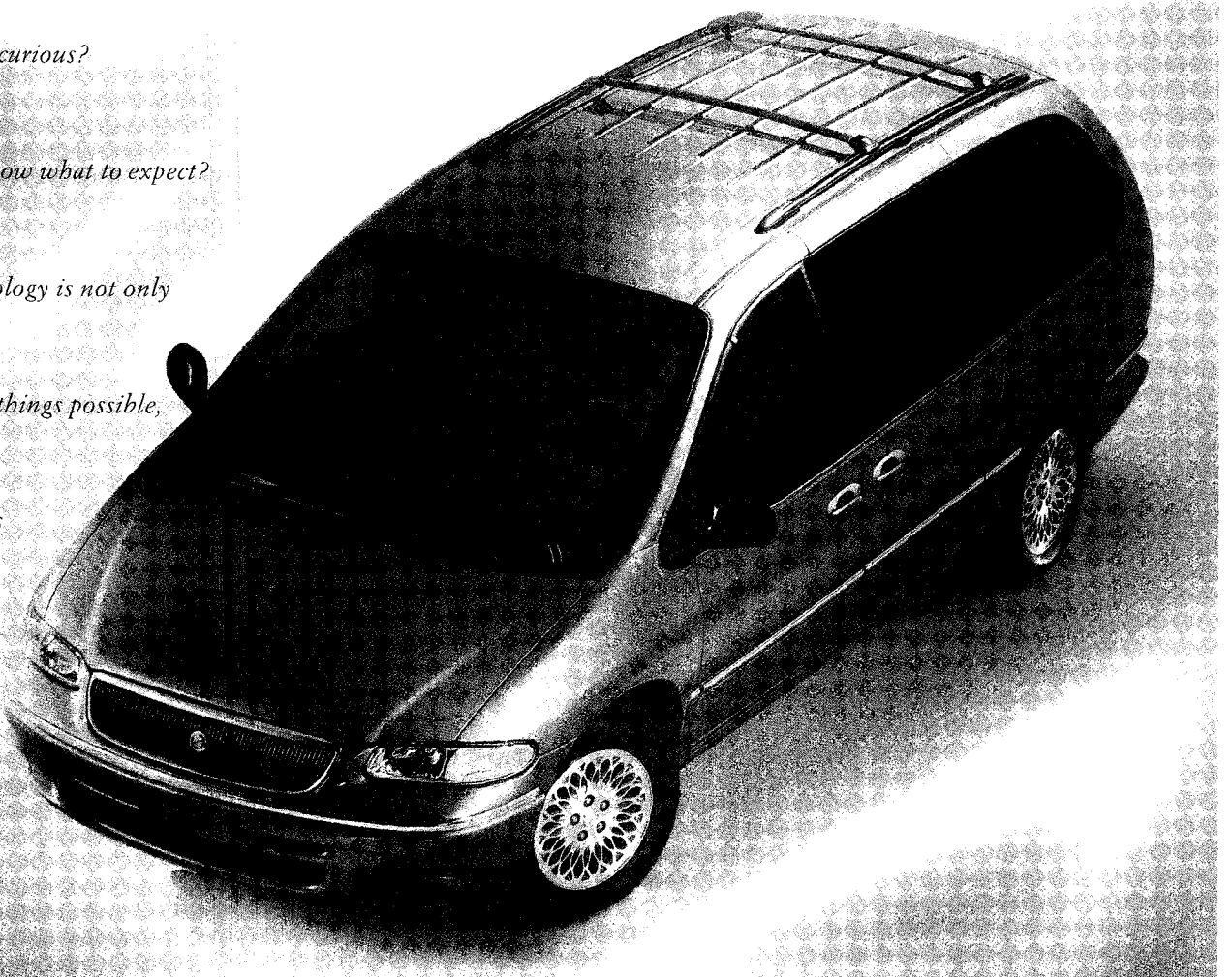

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A Train in Spain

Across northern Spain by rail, from Galicia to the Basque Country

SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA

WHEN I arrive in Santiago, in the region of Galicia, I am glad to see that it is drizzling. Gabriel García Márquez, whose grandmother was from Galicia, said that seeing this place without rain would be a disappointment, because Galicia is a mythical land "and in mythical lands the sun never comes out."

by Lucy McCauley

I am here to roll across northern Spain on *El Transcantábrico*, a touring train owned by the Spanish national narrow-gauge railway company, FEVE. A meanderer by nature, preferring the gradual approach over the immediate way, I have long dreamed of this trip by rail. Stopping at towns and fishing villages en route, *El Transcantábrico* takes a week to wind along 600 miles of the coast that borders the area known as Green Spain.

This is not the Spain of bullfights and sunny beaches. Rather than guitars and castanets, one hears bagpipes—among the many influences of the Celts who settled here until about 100 B.C. The geography is mountainous, with the Picos de Europa forming a misty backdrop much of the way and setting off lush green fields, fishing villages, ocean, and rias, or estuary waters.

Traveling from Santiago to San Sebastián (or the reverse), the train passes through the four autonomous regions of Galicia, Asturias, Cantabria, and the Basque Country. Two or three stops a day include bus and walking tours focused on local architecture and history. Also known as "the gastronomic route," the journey features elegant meals, often incorporating the fresh fish for which northern Spain is famous, in such settings as a small castle designed by Antonio Gaudí and a renovated stable.

I'm not due to meet the train for a few hours, so I make my way through Santiago de Compostela along one of the many pedestrian streets, cobbled and narrow, that wind among convents and churches. Tapas bars serve empanadas filled with tuna, tiny, almost sweet green peppers fried with oil and sea salt, and crusty fresh bread. The city's distinctive cheese, tetilla, shaped like a breast, is mild and creamy and sits audaciously in pairs in restaurant windows.

The devout believe that the remains of Saint James were found in this city, on the spot where the cathedral was built. Santiago is therefore considered Catholicism's third holiest place, after Rome and Jerusalem, and since the Middle Ages millions have traversed the pilgrims' route to the city.

On a street near the cathedral I pass a man playing an organ; "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring" echoes off the stone archway above him. The rain begins again, and water gleams in sunlight.

> It rains in Santiago,
> my sweet love.
> White camellia of the air,
> shadowy shines the sun.

So wrote Federico García Lorca of this city. Umbrellas pop up along the street in a synchronized dance. The local people conspire with their climate. If you happen to visit on a sunny day, the people will tell you, "Oh, but you must see Santiago in the rain!"

▪ ▪ ▪

At the Hotel de los Reyes Católicos, a luxurious parador, I meet the group that will ride *El Transcantábrico*. Natalia, our guide, directs us where to put our luggage. She is from Asturias and blonde—not unusual for Spaniards from the north—and she speaks five languages, though for this group she will need only three. In a patter she will keep up with unflagging energy throughout the week, she begins in Spanish, for the majority (two couples from Madrid, five Catalans, a small Puerto Rican group), followed by English for the Americans, British, and Swedish among us, and then German for the few Swiss and Germans. There are thirty-four of us this week, though the train can accommodate fifty-four.

The first official meal of the trip is lunch at this hotel, once a hospital for the nobility. The food of the north is sumptuous and unpretentious—fish and meat, wonderful cream and cheese sauces, potatoes in myriad forms. Our meals are served on Spanish time: lunch at two or three, dinner around nine.

Today we eat green salad topped with jamón serrano, a prosciutto-like ham. I look at my nine utensils, and a table companion kindly tells me to begin from the outside and work toward the plate. She is the well-manicured wife of a former U.S. diplomat, so I take her word for it. The salad is followed by coquilles Saint Jacques (a scallop dish that is, of course, named for Saint James) and a fine Ribeiro, a white wine from the region. Next comes prime rib with potatoes, served with a Márques de Cáceres Rioja. Dessert is a cream-filled crepe, folded like a napkin.

Illustrations by Mary Woodin

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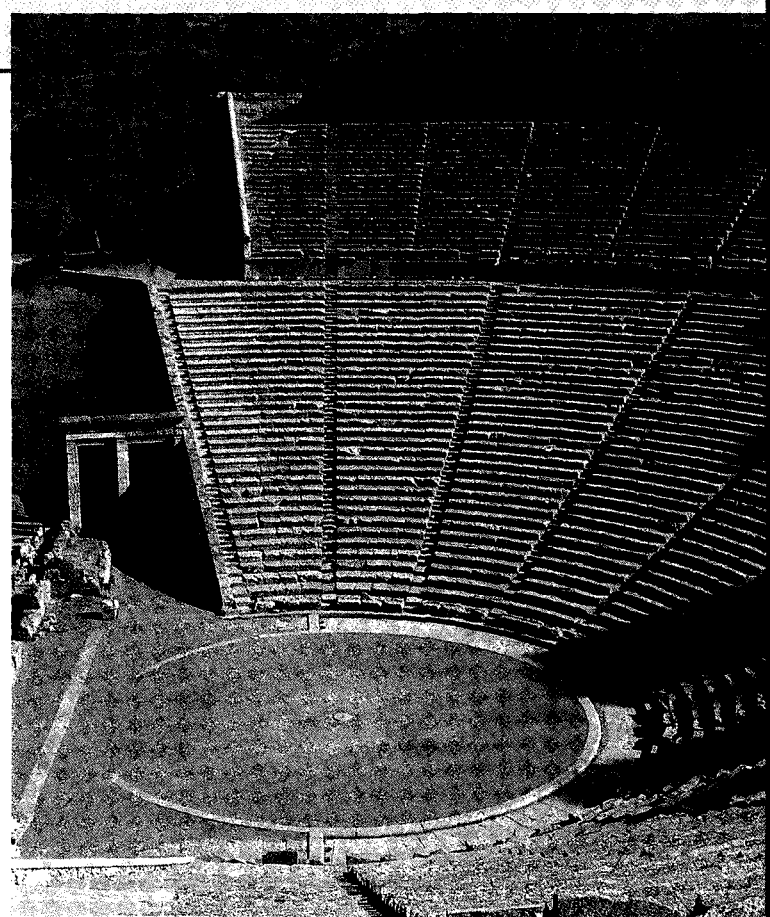

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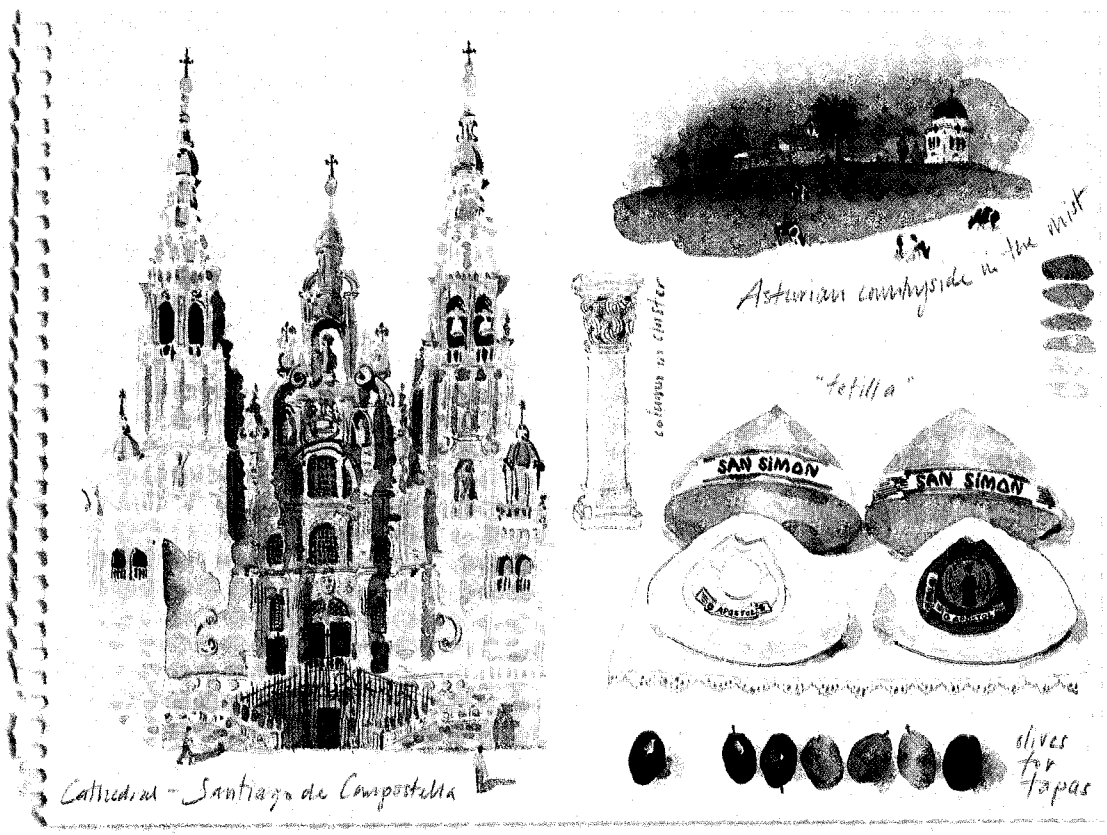
This is my first experience with tour-group travel, and I am intrigued by how clannish we are from the outset. The two couples from Madrid, previously strangers, find each other immediately. Likewise the Catalans herd together, as do the Swedish couples. At this first meal I, too, am drawn to travelers from my country—the security of the familiar. But as the trip progresses, our seating arrangements and activities will become more inclusive. The shy young German traveling with her mother and brother will tentatively break away from them to befriend me. The Madrileños will teach me the Spanish way to drink Asturian hard cider (everyone from the same cup). The humor of the Puerto Ricans, prone to loud bursts of laughter from the back of the tour bus, will soon infect the rest of us.



EL FERROL

AFTER lunch we ride a bus from Santiago to this town, where Francisco Franco was born and where *El Transcantábrico* awaits us. There is a reception in the dining car: velvet cushions, little lamps glowing from each table, waiters offering cava, Spain's sparkling wine. Three more "lounge" cars follow this one—another dining car, a bar, and a nightclub with a dance floor—and then come four sleeping cars with shared baths.

Walking through the train involves zigzagging through narrow aisles. A luxury passenger train since 1983, *El Transcantábrico* runs on a narrow-gauge track, a mere one meter across, designed for lugging coal along mountain curves and coastline.

Fond of small spaces, I hope for a little burrow of a room. I am not disappointed. In my five-by-six-foot cabin are two single bunks, a covered sink, a chest of drawers, a mirrored cabinet, and several hooks with hangers.

The door shuts behind me, and the train jerks forward, the whistle blows, the track slaps beneath my feet. I sink into my bed and rock with the train, watching the landscape. White farmhouses stand stark against green fields. Two boys on a high wall toss rocks onto the train roof. A woman sits in a second-floor window, watching us go by. I wonder if she always knows when the train will come—if she waits for it.

In our eight days of travel we will make close to thirty stops, including overnights in stations. Here are a few highlights.

LUARCA

A TINKLING bell in the hall announces breakfast. In the dining cars tables are set with flutes of fresh orange juice, and breakfast is a buffet of croissants, cheeses, jamón serrano, eggs, melon. The train begins to move, and I watch a landscape that sharply contrasts with yesterday's. Green fields, where sheep graze and horses gallop, have changed to craggy coastline.

We have crossed from Galicia into Asturias. The sun streams through the ever-present mist as we pull into the fishing village of Luarca. A chapel glows white against the sky on a hill above town, a cemetery of marble overlooks the ocean, waves sift over sand with the sound of grain through a sieve. Down the hill from the cemetery is a granite table, a bench encircling it. On a wall above, painted tiles depict Luarca fishermen sitting at that same table, where until a century ago they would meet and place pieces of slate into a small model ship, voting whether to go to sea.

While Natalia tells us about Luarca's shellfishing industry, five white-haired women file in behind her to sit on a low wall overlooking the bay. How many of their ancestors sat at that granite table and weighed in with their pieces of slate? In widows' black cardigans they sit staunchly on the wall, their knees apart like

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men's, some leaning on canes. Soon their laughing voices rise above Natalia's, reclaiming this space from the tourists. I wonder if we are the show, or if they meet daily at this hour to share stories before going home to cook the evening meal.

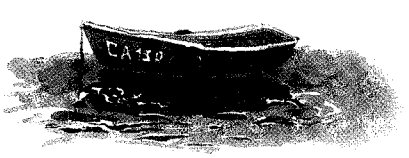
LLANES

THIS is the most popular summer tourist spot in Asturias, with thirty or more crowded beaches tucked into coves. But now, in early fall, windswept, with seagulls crying overhead, it feels like the simple fishing town it is. Until a hundred years ago men hunted whales here; a restaurant now perches on a cliff where, according to local legend, a watchman would light a bonfire each time he sighted a whale.

On a lush hilltop promenade enormous yucca plants burst like green fingers from the ground. Century plants tower twelve feet in the air, with spiked, pineapple-like trunks and tufted pompon branches. Regarded from this promenade, the old city wall stands outlined against the gray sky, the blue Picos de Europa looming in the distance.

Back in town I enter a shop where ceramic witches in pointed hats stand on a shelf. I've seen these miniatures in other shops around northern Spain. When I ask the shopkeeper about them, her face goes blank. "They're decoration," she says flatly.

But I've heard the stories: *brujería*—witchcraft—is as much a constant in northern Spain as fishing is. When the fishing is poor for a long time, people whisper about hexes. Special herbs can be had from certain people who know how to cure. Odd things appear on people's doorsteps: a magpie's head, a black squirrel's tail. Sometimes they're good omens, sometimes not.



SANTANDER

SANTANDER, the capital of Cantabria and one of the most modern cities in northern Spain, has a population of almost 200,000. The people look European-chic: the men have sleek black hair and dress in double-breasted jackets, and the women wear stacked-heel leather boots.

I walk among people out for the *paseo*—the evening stroll—along a garden blooming near the sea. A main port of Spain in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Santander retains much of its period architecture, despite several fires in this century that forced extensive rebuilding.

Darkness falls, and buildings glow under floodlights. I stop in a bar open to the sea. A white-haired man, his mouth full of olives, is talking to the bartender. They both listen patiently as I explain that I've forgotten the name of the restaurant where I'm to meet my group for dinner. I have an X marked on my map, but I can't figure out where I am. They examine the map and say they know the place with the X—it's the tourist-information office. Obviously I misunderstood Natalia's instructions.

"Let us feed you," says the man with olives in his mouth.

"Yes, a nice tapa de tortilla," the bartender says.

I'm hungry and tired from walking. I decide to sit down, and the bartender puts a plate of olives in front of me. This would feel different in the States: a lone woman at a bar. But Spanish tapas bars, the center of social life, feel embracing rather than alienating. Soon a tortilla—a potato omelet—and a beer arrive, and I am warmed by the food and the soft murmur of conversations around me, the feeling of being a part of this moment in this bar in Santander.

GUERNICA

IT'S another overcast morning, and as we pull into Guernica, in the Basque Country, I feel a chill. It seems wrong to arrive on a tour bus at this place with so many ghosts. During the Spanish Civil War more than 1,600 people died here, on April 26, 1937, killed by bombs dropped from German planes on Franco's orders.

Picasso, hearing of the bombing while in France, began the famous painting that bears the name of this town. He wouldn't allow *Guernica* to be exhibited in his native Spain while Franco ruled; today it hangs in Madrid's Reina Sofía Arts Center.

On our walk through Guernica, Natalia's voice, which has been consistently upbeat throughout the trip, suppresses emotion as she describes what happened here, a place that for centuries was the seat of Basque government. Here we see the stump of the 300-year-old oak tree that is the city's symbol; from the Renaissance until the Napoleonic wars, in the early 1800s, Basque leaders gathered under the tree. It is now enshrined in a rotunda on the lawn, and Basque leaders meet in the nearby parliament building.

SAN SEBASTIÁN

THIS is the end of the line: a city on a bay shaped like a perfect ring, a small break where the sea rushes in. On the promenade above the beach people step to the dance of the *paseo*. In a modern variation on this centuries-old tradition of the evening stroll, teenagers wearing Day-glo jackets Rollerblade by. The rain comes suddenly, in sheets. The sea mutes to deep gray, and umbrellas open along the promenade.

Rain has felt as much a part of this trip as the green fields, the looming Picos de Europa, the turquoise estuaries. García Márquez was right about Galicia and the rain, but maybe he should have included the whole coast in his declaration. These northern regions where the sun doesn't come out, where the eye falls upon miles of vibrant green grasses shrouded in white mist, have all seemed like a mythical land.

The week-long train journey, including all meals and multilingual tours, costs $1,500 per person, double occupancy; suites are an extra $300. The train season runs from June through the end of September. Reservations may be made with most travel agents, or more information may be obtained from the Tourist Office of Spain. 666 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10103; phone 212-265-8822; fax 212-265-8864.

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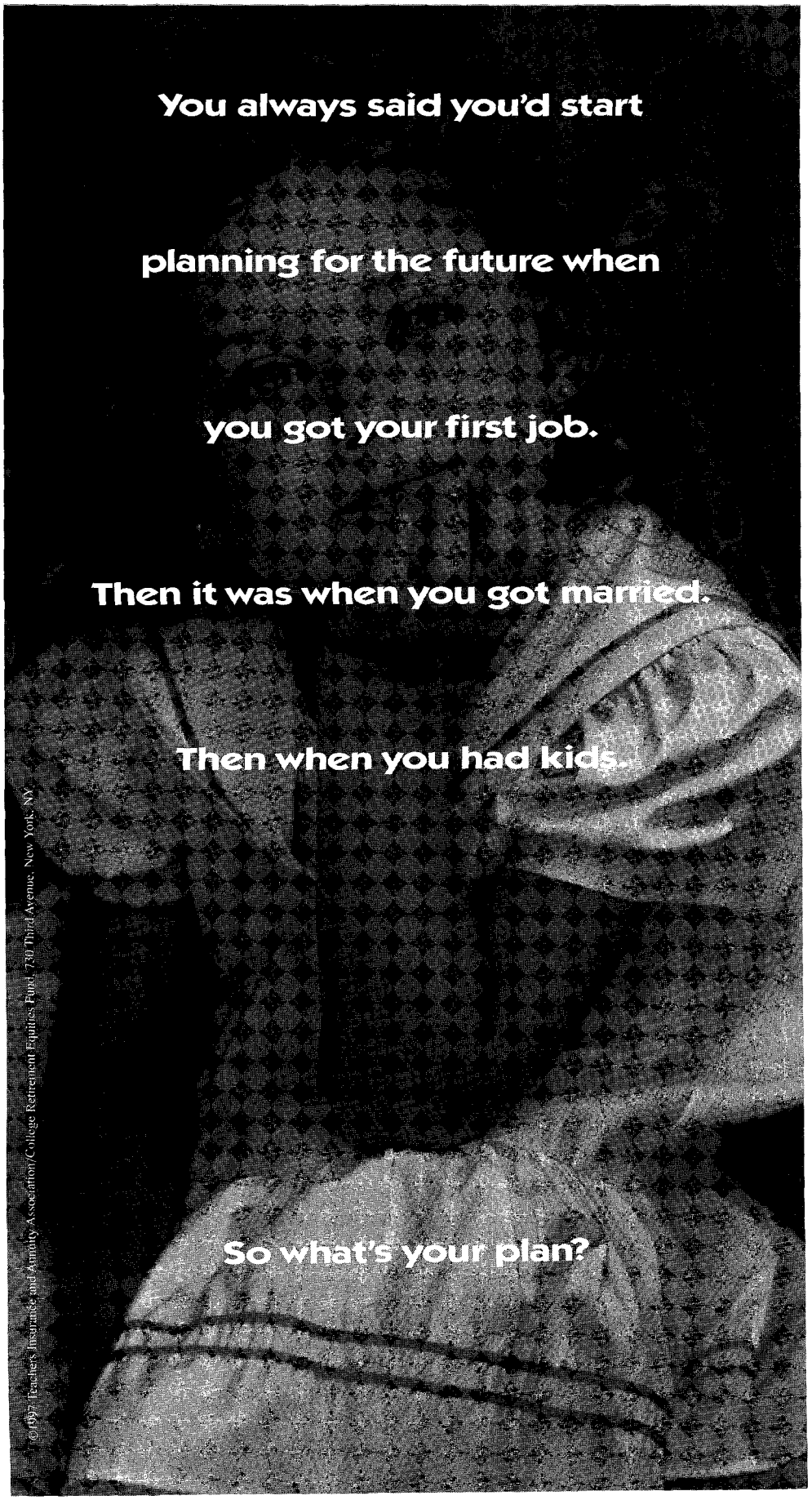

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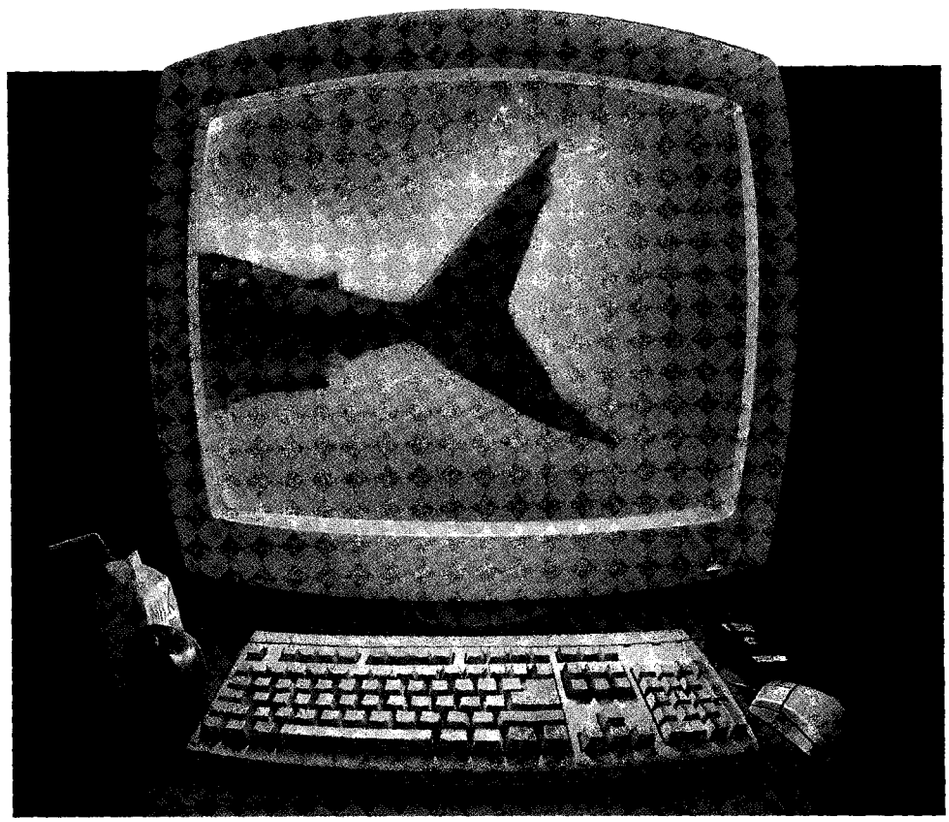
The Computer DELUSION

by TODD OPPENHEIMER



There is no good evidence that most uses of computers significantly improve teaching and learning, yet school districts are cutting programs—music, art, physical education—that enrich children's lives to make room for this dubious nostrum, and the Clinton Administration has embraced the goal of "computers in every classroom" with credulous and costly enthusiasm

IN 1922 Thomas Edison predicted that "the motion picture is destined to revolutionize our educational system and . . . in a few years it will supplant largely, if not entirely, the use of textbooks." Twenty-three years later, in 1945, William Levenson, the director of the Cleveland public schools' radio station, claimed that "the time may come when a portable radio receiver will be as common in the classroom as is the blackboard." Forty years after that the noted psychologist B. F. Skinner, referring to the first days of his "teaching machines," in the late 1950s and early 1960s, wrote, "I was soon saying that, with the help of teaching machines and programmed instruction, students could learn twice as much in the same time and with the same effort as in a standard classroom." Ten years after Skinner's recollections were published, President Bill Clinton campaigned for "a bridge to the twenty-first century . . . where computers are as much a part of the classroom as blackboards." Clinton was not alone in his enthusiasm for a program estimated to cost somewhere between $40 billion and $100 billion over the next five years. Speaker of the

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House Newt Gingrich, talking about computers to the Republican National Committee early this year, said, "We could do so much to make education available twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, that people could literally have a whole different attitude toward learning."

If history really is repeating itself, the schools are in serious trouble. In *Teachers and Machines: The Classroom Use of Technology Since 1920* (1986), Larry Cuban, a professor of education at Stanford University and a former school superintendent, observed that as successive rounds of new technology failed their promoters' expectations, a pattern emerged. The cycle began with big promises backed by the technology developers' research. In the classroom, however, teachers never really embraced the new tools, and no significant academic improvement occurred. This provoked consistent responses: the problem was money, spokespeople argued, or teacher resistance, or the paralyzing school bureaucracy. Meanwhile, few people questioned the technology advocates' claims. As results continued to lag, the blame was finally laid on the machines. Soon schools were sold on the next generation of technology, and the lucrative cycle started all over again.

Today's technology evangels argue that we've learned our lesson from past mistakes. As in each previous round, they say that when our new hot technology—the computer—is compared with yesterday's, today's is better. "It can do the same things, plus," Richard Riley, the U.S. Secretary of Education, told me this spring.

How much better is it, really?

The promoters of computers in schools again offer prodigious research showing improved academic achievement after using their technology. The research has again come under occasional attack, but this time quite a number of teachers seem to be backing classroom technology. In a poll taken early last year U.S. teachers ranked computer skills and media technology as more "essential" than the study of European history, biology, chemistry, and physics; than dealing with social problems such as drugs and family breakdown; than learning practical job skills; and than reading modern American writers such as Steinbeck and Hemingway or classic ones such as Plato and Shakespeare.

In keeping with these views New Jersey cut state aid to a number of school districts this past year and then spent $10 million on classroom computers. In Union City, California, a single school district is spending $27 million to buy new gear for a mere eleven schools. The Kittridge Street Elementary School, in Los Angeles, killed its music program last year to hire a technology coordinator; in Mansfield, Massachusetts, administrators dropped proposed teaching positions in art, music, and physical education, and then spent $333,000 on computers; in one Virginia school the art room was turned into a computer laboratory. (Ironically, a half dozen preliminary studies recently suggested that music and art classes may build the physical size of a child's brain, and its powers for subjects such as language, math, science, and engineering—in one case far more than computer work did.) Meanwhile, months after a New Technology High School opened in Napa, California, where computers sit on every student's desk and all academic classes use computers, some students were complaining of headaches, sore eyes, and wrist pain.

Throughout the country, as spending on technology increases, school book purchases are stagnant. Shop classes, with their tradition of teaching children building skills with wood and metal, have been almost entirely replaced by new "technology education programs." In San Francisco only one public school still offers a full shop program—the lone vocational high school. "We get kids who don't know the difference between a screwdriver and a ball peen hammer," James Dahlman, the school's vocational-department chair, told me recently. "How are they going to make a career choice? Administrators are stuck in this mindset that all kids will go to a four-year college and become a doctor or a lawyer, and that's not true. I know some who went to college, graduated, and then had to go back to technical school to get a job." Last year the school superintendent in Great Neck, Long Island, proposed replacing elementary school shop classes with computer classes and training the shop teachers as computer coaches. Rather than being greeted with enthusiasm, the proposal provoked a backlash.

Interestingly, shop classes and field trips are two programs that the National Information Infrastructure Advisory Council, the Clinton Administration's technology task force, suggests reducing in order to shift resources into computers. But are these results what technology promoters really intend? "You need to apply common sense," Esther Dyson, the president of EDventure Holdings and one of the task force's leading school advocates, told me recently. "Shop with a good teacher probably is worth more than computers with a lousy teacher. But if it's a poor program, this may provide a good excuse for cutting it. There will be a lot of trials and errors with this. And I don't know how to prevent those errors."

The issue, perhaps, is the magnitude of the errors. Alan Lesgold, a professor of psychology and the associate director of the Learning Research and Development Center at the University of Pittsburgh, calls the computer an "amplifier," because it encourages both enlightened study practices and thoughtless ones. There's a real risk, though, that the thoughtless practices will dominate, slowly dumbing down huge numbers of tomorrow's adults. As Sherry Turkle, a professor of the sociology of science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and a longtime observer of children's use of computers, told me, "The possibilities of using this thing poorly so outweigh the chance of using it well, it makes people like us, who are fundamentally optimistic about computers, very reticent."

Perhaps the best way to separate fact from fantasy is to

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take supporters' claims about computerized learning one by one and compare them with the evidence in the academic literature and in the everyday experiences I have observed or heard about in a variety of classrooms.

Five main arguments underlie the campaign to computerize our nation's schools.

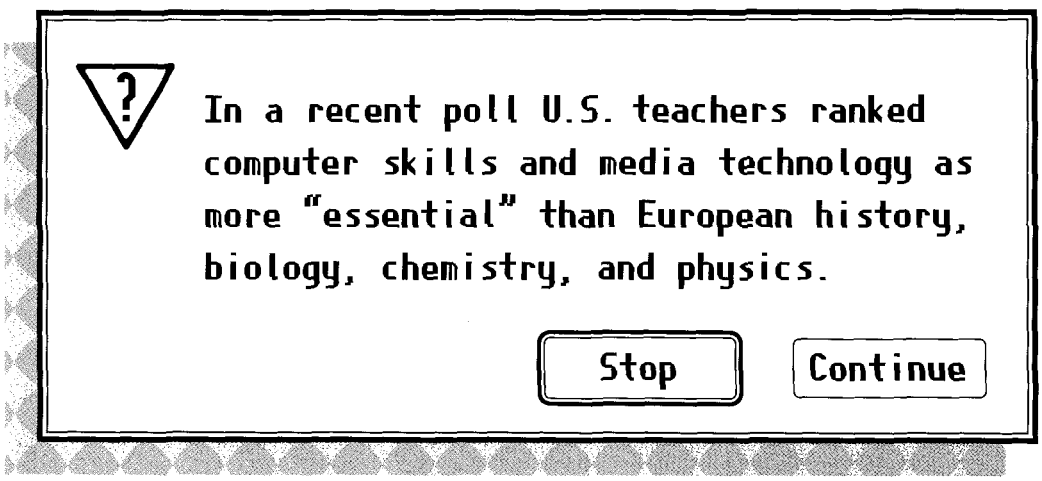
• Computers improve both teaching practices and student achievement.

• Computer literacy should be taught as early as possible; otherwise students will be left behind.

• To make tomorrow's work force competitive in an increasingly high-tech world, learning computer skills must be a priority.

• Technology programs leverage support from the business community—badly needed today because schools are increasingly starved for funds.

• Work with computers—particularly using the Internet—brings students valuable connections with teachers, other schools and students, and a wide network of professionals around the globe. These connections spice the school day with a sense of real-world relevance, and broaden the educational community.



"The Filmstrips of the 1990s"

CLINTON'S vision of computerized classrooms arose partly out of the findings of the presidential task force—thirty-six leaders from industry, education, and several interest groups who have guided the Administration's push to get computers into the schools. The report of the task force, "Connecting K–12 Schools to the Information Superhighway" (produced by the consulting firm McKinsey & Co.), begins by citing numerous studies that have apparently proved that computers enhance student achievement significantly. One "meta-analysis" (a study that reviews other studies—in this case 130 of them) reported that computers had improved performance in "a wide range of subjects, including language arts, math, social studies and science." Another found improved organization and focus in students' writing. A third cited twice the normal gains in math skills. Several schools boasted of greatly improved attendance.

Unfortunately, many of these studies are more anecdotal than conclusive. Some, including a giant, oft-cited meta-analysis of 254 studies, lack the necessary scientific controls to make solid conclusions possible. The circumstances are artificial and not easily repeated, results aren't statistically reliable, or, most frequently, the studies did not control for other influences, such as differences between teaching methods. This last factor is critical, because computerized learning inevitably forces teachers to adjust their style—only sometimes for the better. Some studies were industry-funded, and thus tended to publicize mostly positive findings. "The research is set up in a way to find benefits that aren't really there," Edward Miller, a former editor of the *Harvard Education Letter*, says. "Most knowledgeable people agree that most of the research isn't valid. It's so flawed it shouldn't even be called research. Essentially, it's just worthless." Once the faulty studies are weeded out, Miller says, the ones that remain "are inconclusive"—that is, they show no significant change in either direction. Even Esther Dyson admits the studies are undependable. "I don't think those studies amount to much either way," she says. "In this area there is little proof."

Why are solid conclusions so elusive? Look at Apple Computer's "Classrooms of Tomorrow," perhaps the most widely studied effort to teach using computer technology. In the early 1980s Apple shrewdly realized that donating computers to schools might help not only students but also company sales, as Apple's ubiquity in classrooms turned legions of families into Apple loyalists. Last year, after the *San Jose Mercury News* (published in Apple's Silicon Valley home) ran a series questioning the effectiveness of computers in schools, the paper printed an opinion-page response from Terry Crane, an Apple vice-president. "Instead of isolating students," Crane wrote, "technology actually encouraged them to collaborate more than in traditional classrooms. Students also learned to explore and represent information dynamically and creatively, communicate effectively about complex processes, become independent learners and self-starters and become more socially aware and confident."

Crane didn't mention that after a decade of effort and the donation of equipment worth more than $25 million to thirteen schools, there is scant evidence of greater student

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achievement. To be fair, educators on both sides of the computer debate acknowledge that today's tests of student achievement are shockingly crude. They're especially weak in measuring intangibles such as enthusiasm and self-motivation, which do seem evident in Apple's classrooms and other computer-rich schools. In any event, what is fun and what is educational may frequently be at odds. "Computers in classrooms are the filmstrips of the 1990s," Clifford Stoll, the author of *Silicon Snake Oil: Second Thoughts on the Information Highway* (1995), told *The New York Times* last year, recalling his own school days in the 1960s. "We loved them because we didn't have to think for an hour, teachers loved them because they didn't have to teach, and parents loved them because it showed their schools were high-tech. But no learning happened."

Stoll somewhat overstates the case—obviously, benefits can come from strengthening a student's motivation. Still, Apple's computers may bear less responsibility for that change than Crane suggests. In the beginning, when Apple did little more than dump computers in classrooms and homes, this produced no real results, according to Jane David, a consultant Apple hired to study its classroom initiative. Apple quickly learned that teachers needed to change their classroom approach to what is commonly called "project-oriented learning." This is an increasingly popular teaching method, in which students learn through doing and teachers act as facilitators or partners rather than as didacts. (Teachers sometimes refer to this approach, which arrived in classrooms before computers did, as being "the guide on the side instead of the sage on the stage.") But what the students learned "had less to do with the computer and more to do with the teaching," David concluded. "If you took the computers out, there would still be good teaching there." This story is heard in school after school, including two impoverished schools—Clear View Elementary School, in southern California, and the Christopher Columbus middle school, in New Jersey—that the Clinton Administration has loudly celebrated for turning themselves around with computers. At Christopher Columbus, in fact, students' test scores rose before computers arrived, not afterward, because of relatively basic changes: longer class periods, new books, after-school programs, and greater emphasis on student projects and collaboration.

During recent visits to some San Francisco–area schools I could see what it takes for students to use computers properly, and why most don't.

On a bluff south of downtown San Francisco, in the middle of one of the city's lower-income neighborhoods, Claudia Schaffner, a tenth-grader, tapped away at a multimedia machine in a computer lab at Thurgood Marshall Academic High School, one of half a dozen special technology schools in the city. Schaffner was using a physics program to simulate the trajectory of a marble on a small roller coaster. "It helps to visualize it first, like 'A is for Apple' with kindergartners," Schaffner told me, while mousing up and down the virtual roller coaster. "I can see how the numbers go into action." This was lunch hour, and the students' excitement about what they can do in this lab was palpable. Schaffner could barely tear herself away. "I need to go eat some food," she finally said, returning within minutes to eat a rice dish at the keyboard.

Schaffner's teacher is Dennis Frezzo, an electrical-engineering graduate from the University of California at Berkeley. Despite his considerable knowledge of computer programming, Frezzo tries to keep classwork focused on physical projects. For a mere $8,000, for example, several teachers put together a multifaceted robotics lab, consisting of an advanced Lego engineering kit and twenty-four old 386-generation computers. Frezzo's students used these materials to build a tiny electric car, whose motion was to be triggered by a light sensor. When the light sensor didn't work, the students figured out why. "That's a real problem—what you'd encounter in the real world," Frezzo told me. "I prefer they get stuck on small real-world problems instead of big fake problems"—like the simulated natural disasters that fill one popular educational game. "It's sort of the Zen approach to education," Frezzo said. "It's not the big problems. Isaac Newton already solved those. What come up in life are the little ones."

It's one thing to confront technology's complexity at a high school—especially one that's blessed with four different computer labs and some highly skilled teachers like Frezzo, who know enough, as he put it, "to keep computers in their place." It's quite another to grapple with a high-tech future in the lower grades, especially at everyday schools that lack special funding or technical support. As evidence, when *U.S. News & World Report* published a cover story last fall on schools that make computers work, five of the six were high schools—among them Thurgood Marshall. Although the sixth was an elementary school, the featured program involved children with disabilities—the one group that does show consistent benefits from computerized instruction.

Artificial Experience

CONSIDER the scene at one elementary school, Sanchez, which sits on the edge of San Francisco's Latino community. For several years Sanchez, like many other schools, has made do with a roomful of basic Apple IIes. Last year, curious about what computers could do for youngsters, a local entrepreneur donated twenty costly Power Macintoshes—three for each of five classrooms, and one for each of the five lucky teachers to take home. The teachers who got the new machines were delighted. "It's the best thing we've ever done," Adela Najarro, a third-grade bilingual teacher, told me. She mentioned one boy, perhaps with a learning disability, who had started to hate school.

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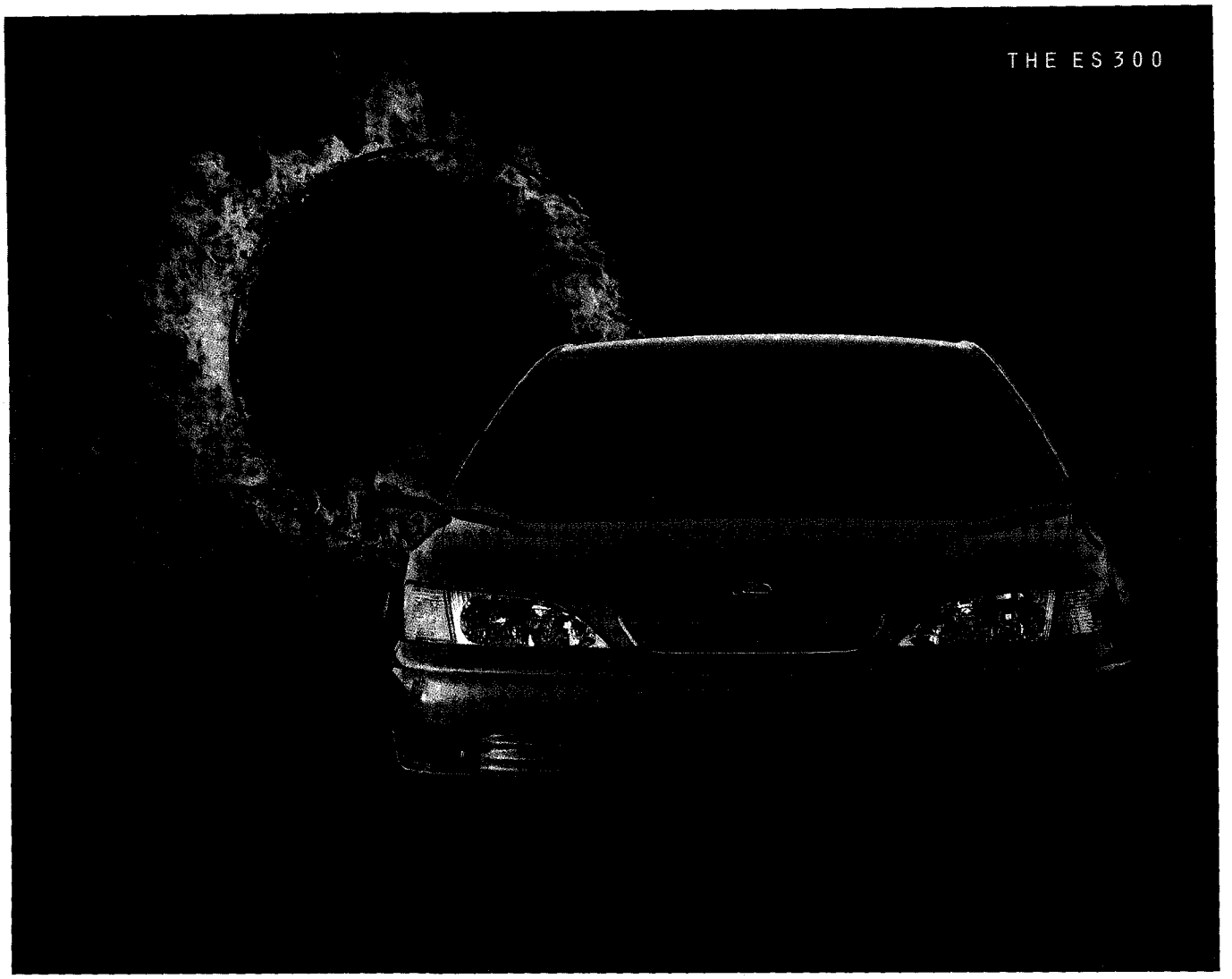

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Once he had a computer to play with, she said, "his whole attitude changed." Najarro is now a true believer, even when it comes to children without disabilities. "Every single child," she said, "will do more work for you and do better work with a computer. Just because it's on a monitor, kids pay more attention. There's this magic to the screen."

Down the hall from Najarro's classroom her colleague Rose Marie Ortiz had a more troubled relationship with computers. On the morning I visited, Ortiz took her bilingual special-education class of second-, third-, and fourth-graders into the lab filled with the old Apple IIes. The students look forward to this weekly expedition so much that Ortiz gets exceptional behavior from them all morning. Out of date though these machines are, they do offer a range of exercises, in subjects such as science, math, reading, social studies, and problem solving. But owing to this group's learning problems and limited English skills, math drills were all that Ortiz could give them. Nonetheless, within minutes the kids were excitedly navigating their way around screens depicting floating airplanes and trucks carrying varying numbers of eggs. As the children struggled, many resorted to counting in whatever way they knew how. Some squinted at the screen, painstakingly moving their fingers from one tiny egg symbol to the next. "*Tres, cuatro, cinco, seis* . . . ," one little girl said loudly, trying to hear herself above her counting neighbors. Another girl kept a piece of paper handy, on which she marked a line for each egg. Several others resorted to the slow but tried and true—their fingers. Some just guessed. Once the children arrived at answers, they frantically typed them onto the screen, hoping it would advance to something fun, the way Nintendos, Game Boys, and video-arcade games do. Sometimes their answers were right, and the screen did advance; sometimes they

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weren't; but the children were rarely discouraged. As schoolwork goes, this was a blast.

"It's highly motivating for them," Ortiz said as she rushed from machine to machine, attending not to math questions but to computer glitches. Those she couldn't fix she simply abandoned. "I don't know how practical it is. You see," she said, pointing to a girl counting on her fingers, "these kids still need the hands-on"—meaning the opportunity to manipulate physical objects such as beans or colored blocks. The value of hands-on learning, child-development experts believe, is that it deeply imprints knowledge into a young child's brain, by transmitting the lessons of experience through a variety of sensory pathways. "Curiously enough," the educational psychologist Jane Healy wrote in *Endangered Minds: Why Children Don't Think and What We Can Do About It* (1990), "visual stimulation is probably not the main access route to nonverbal reasoning. Body movements, the ability to touch, feel, manipulate, and build sensory awareness of relationships in the physical world, are its main foundations." The problem, Healy wrote, is that "in schools, traditionally, the senses have had little status after kindergarten."

Ortiz believes that the computer-lab time, brief as it is, dilutes her students' attention to language. "These kids are all language-delayed," she said. Though only modest sums had so far been spent at her school, Ortiz and other local teachers felt that the push was on for technology over other scholastic priorities. The year before, Sanchez had let its librarian go, to be replaced by a part-timer.

When Ortiz finally got the students rounded up and out the door, the kids were still worked up. "They're never this wired after reading group," she said. "They're usually just exhausted, because I've been reading with them, making

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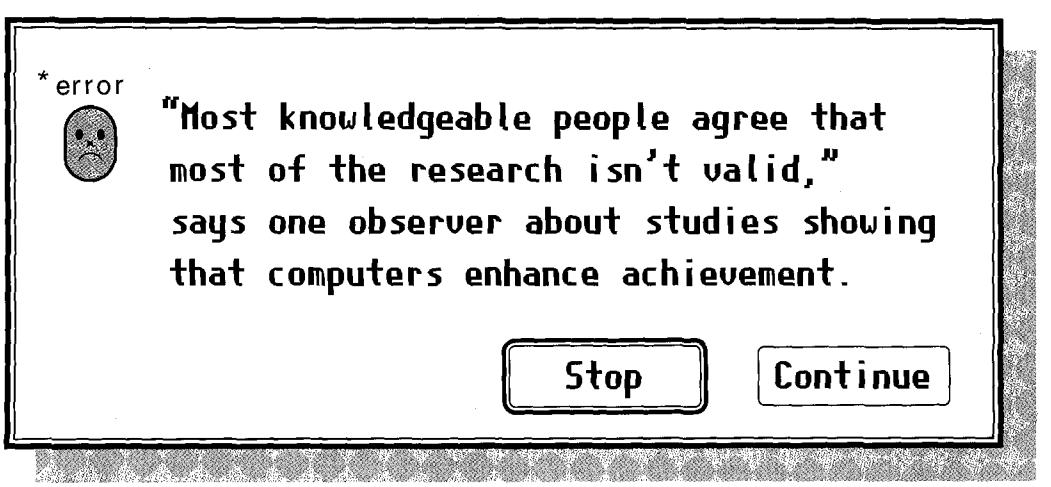
them write and talk." Back in homeroom Ortiz showed off the students' monthly handwritten writing samples. "Now, could you do that on the computer?" she asked. "No, because we'd be hung up on finding the keys." So why does Ortiz bother taking her students to the computer lab at all? "I guess I come in here for the computer literacy. If everyone else is getting it, I feel these kids should get it too."

Some computerized elementary school programs have avoided these pitfalls, but the record subject by subject is mixed at best. Take writing, where by all accounts and by my own observations the computer does encourage practice—changes are easier to make on a keyboard than with an eraser, and the lettering looks better. Diligent students use these conveniences to improve their writing, but the less committed frequently get seduced by electronic opportunities to make a school paper look snazzy. (The easy "cut and paste" function in today's word-processing programs, for example, is apparently encouraging many students to cobble together research materials without thinking them through.) Reading programs get particularly bad reviews. One small but carefully controlled study went so far as to claim that Reader Rabbit, a reading program now used in more than 100,000 schools, caused students to suffer a 50 percent drop in creativity. (Apparently, after forty-nine students used the program for seven months, they were no longer able to answer open-ended questions and showed a markedly diminished ability to brainstorm with fluency and originality.) What about hard sciences, which seem so well suited to computer study? Logo, the high-profile programming language refined by Seymour Papert and widely used in middle and high schools, fostered huge hopes of expanding children's cognitive skills. As students directed the computer to build things, such as geometric shapes, Papert believed, they would learn "procedural thinking," similar to the way a computer processes information. According to a number of studies, however, Logo has generally failed to deliver on its promises. Judah Schwartz, a professor of education at Harvard and a co-director of the school's Educational Technology Center, told me that a few newer applications, when used properly, can dramatically expand children's math and science thinking by giving them new tools to "make and explore conjectures." Still, Schwartz acknowledges that perhaps "ninety-nine percent" of the educational programs are "terrible, really terrible."

Even in success stories important caveats continually pop up. The best educational software is usually complex—most suited to older students and sophisticated teachers. In other cases the schools have been blessed with abundance—fancy equipment, generous financial support, or extra teachers—that is difficult if not impossible to duplicate in the average school. Even if it could be duplicated, the literature suggests, many teachers would still struggle with technology. Computers suffer frequent breakdowns; when they do work, their seductive images often distract students from the lessons at hand—which many teachers say makes it difficult to build meaningful rapport with their students.

With such a discouraging record of student and teacher performance with computers, why has the Clinton Administration focused so narrowly on the hopeful side of the story? Part of the answer may lie in the makeup of the Administration's technology task force. Judging from accounts of the task force's deliberations, all thirty-six members are unequivocal technology advocates. Two thirds of them work in the high-tech and entertainment industries. The effect of the group's tilt can be seen in its report. Its introduction adopts the authoritative posture of impartial fact-finder, stating that "this report does not attempt to lay out a national blueprint, nor does it recommend specific public policy goals." But it comes pretty close. Each chapter describes various strategies for getting computers into classrooms, and the introduction acknowledges that "this report does not evaluate the relative merits of competing demands on educational funding (e.g., more computers versus smaller class sizes)."



When I spoke with Esther Dyson and other task-force members about what discussion the group had had about the potential downside of computerized education, they said there hadn't been any. And when I asked Linda Roberts, Clinton's lead technology adviser in the Department of Education, whether the task force was influenced by any self-interest, she said no, quite the opposite: the group's charter actually gave its members license to help the technology

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industry directly, but they concentrated on schools because that's where they saw the greatest need.

That sense of need seems to have been spreading outside Washington. Last summer a California task force urged the state to spend $11 billion on computers in California schools, which have struggled for years under funding cuts that have driven academic achievement down to among the lowest levels in the nation. This task force, composed of forty-six teachers, parents, technology experts, and business executives, concluded, "More than any other single measure, computers and network technologies, properly implemented, offer the greatest potential to right what's wrong with our public schools." Other options mentioned in the group's report—reducing class size, improving teachers' salaries and facilities, expanding hours of instruction—were considered less important than putting kids in front of computers.

"Hypertext Minds"

TODAY'S parents, knowing firsthand how families were burned by television's false promises, may want some objective advice about the age at which their children should become computer literate. Although there are no real guidelines, computer boosters send continual messages that if children don't begin early, they'll be left behind. Linda Roberts thinks that there's no particular minimum age—and no maximum number of hours that children should spend at a terminal. Are there examples of excess? "I haven't seen it yet," Roberts told me with a laugh. In schools throughout the country administrators and teachers demonstrate the same excitement, boasting about the wondrous things that children of five or six can do on computers: drawing, typing, playing with elementary science simulations and other programs called "educational games."

The schools' enthusiasm for these activities is not universally shared by specialists in childhood development. The doubters' greatest concern is for the very young—preschool through third grade, when a child is most impressionable. Their apprehension involves two main issues.

First, they consider it important to give children a broad base—emotionally, intellectually, and in the five senses—before introducing something as technical and one-dimensional as a computer. Second, they believe that the human and physical world holds greater learning potential.

The importance of a broad base for a child may be most apparent when it's missing. In *Endangered Minds*, Jane Healy wrote of an English teacher who could readily tell which of her students' essays were conceived on a computer. "They don't link ideas," the teacher says. "They just write one thing, and then they write another one, and they don't seem to see or develop the relationships between them." The problem, Healy argued, is that the pizzazz of computerized schoolwork may hide these analytical gaps, which "won't become apparent until [the student] can't organize herself around a homework assignment or a job that requires initiative. More commonplace activities, such as figuring out how to nail two boards together, organizing a game . . . may actually form a better basis for real-world intelligence."

Others believe they have seen computer games expand children's imaginations. High-tech children "think differently from the rest of us," William D. Winn, the director of the Learning Center at the University of Washington's Human Interface Technology Laboratory, told *Business Week* in a recent cover story on the benefits of computer games. "They develop hypertext minds. They leap around. It's as though their cognitive strategies were parallel, not sequential." Healy argues the opposite. She and other psychologists think that the computer screen flattens information into narrow, sequential data. This kind of material, they believe, exercises mostly one half of the brain—the left hemisphere, where primarily sequential thinking occurs. The "right brain" meanwhile gets short shrift—yet this is the hemisphere that works on different kinds of information simultaneously. It shapes our multi-faceted impressions, and serves as the engine of creative analysis.

Opinions diverge in part because research on the brain is still so sketchy, and computers are so new, that the effect of computers on the brain remains a great mystery. "I don't think we know anything about it," Harry Chugani, a pediatric neurobiologist at Wayne State University, told me. This very ignorance makes skeptics wary. "Nobody knows how kids' internal wiring works," Clifford Stoll wrote in *Silicon Snake Oil*, "but anyone who's directed away from social interactions has a head start on turning out weird. . . . No computer can teach what a walk through a pine forest feels like. Sensation has no substitute."

This points to the conservative developmentalists' second concern: the danger that even if hours in front of the screen are limited, unabashed enthusiasm for the computer sends the wrong message: that the mediated world is more significant than the real one. "It's like TV commercials," Barbara Scales, the head teacher at the Child Study Center at the University of California at Berkeley, told me. "Kids get so hyped up, it can change their expectations about stimulation, versus what they generate themselves." In *Silicon Snake Oil*, Michael Fellows, a computer scientist at the University of Victoria, in British Columbia, was even blunter. "Most schools would probably be better off if they threw their computers into the Dumpster."

Faced with such sharply contrasting viewpoints, which are based on such uncertain ground, how is a responsible policymaker to proceed? "A prudent society controls its own infatuation with 'progress' when planning for its young," Healy argued in *Endangered Minds*.

> Unproven technologies . . . may offer lively visions, but they can also be detrimental to the development of the young plastic brain. The cerebral cortex is a wondrously

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well-buffered mechanism that can withstand a good bit of well-intentioned bungling. Yet there is a point at which fundamental neural substrates for reasoning may be jeopardized for children who lack proper physical, intellectual, or emotional nurturance. Childhood—and the brain—have their own imperatives. In development, missed opportunities may be difficult to recapture.

The problem is that technology leaders rarely include these or other warnings in their recommendations. When I asked Dyson why the Clinton task force proceeded with such fervor, despite the classroom computer's shortcomings, she said, "It's so clear the world is changing."

Real Job Training

IN the past decade, according to the presidential task force's report, the number of jobs requiring computer skills has increased from 25 percent of all jobs in 1983 to 47 percent in 1993. By 2000, the report estimates, 60 percent of the nation's jobs will demand these skills—and pay an average of 10 to 15 percent more than jobs involving no computer work. Although projections of this sort are far from reliable, it's a safe bet that computer skills will be needed for a growing proportion of tomorrow's work force. But what priority should these skills be given among other studies?

Listen to Tom Henning, a physics teacher at Thurgood Marshall, the San Francisco technology high school. Henning has a graduate degree in engineering, and helped to found a Silicon Valley company that manufactures electronic navigation equipment. "My bias is the physical reality," Henning told me, as we sat outside a shop where he was helping students to rebuild an old motorcycle. "I'm no technophobe. I can program computers." What worries Henning is that computers at best engage only two senses, hearing and sight—and only two-dimensional sight at that. "Even if they're doing three-dimensional computer modeling, that's still a two-D replica of a three-D world. If you took a kid who grew up on Nintendo, he's not going to have the necessary skills. He needs to have done it first with Tinkertoys or clay, or carved it out of balsa wood." As David Elkind, a professor of child development at Tufts University, puts it, "A dean of the University of Iowa's school of engineering used to say the best engineers were the farm boys," because they knew how machinery really worked.

Surely many employers will disagree, and welcome the commercially applicable computer skills that today's high-tech training can bring them. What's striking is how easy it is to find other employers who share Henning's and Elkind's concerns.

Kris Meisling, a senior geological-research adviser for Mobil Oil, told me that "people who use computers a lot slowly grow rusty in their ability to think." Meisling's group creates charts and maps—some computerized, some not—to plot where to drill for oil. In large one-dimensional analyses, such as sorting volumes of seismic data, the computer saves vast amounts of time, sometimes making previously impossible tasks easy. This lures people in his field, Meisling believes, into using computers as much as possible. But when geologists turn to computers for "interpretive" projects, he finds, they often miss information, and their oversights are further obscured by the computer's captivating automatic design functions. This is why Meisling still works regularly with a pencil and paper—tools that, ironically, he considers more interactive than the computer, because they force him to think implications through.

"You can't simultaneously get an overview and detail with a computer," he says. "It's linear. It gives you tunnel vision. What computers can do well is what can be calculated over and over. What they can't do is innovation. If you think of some new way to do or look at things and the software can't do it, you're stuck. So a lot of people think, 'Well, I guess it's a dumb idea, or it's unnecessary.'"

I have heard similar warnings from people in other businesses, including high-tech enterprises. A spokeswoman for Hewlett-Packard, the giant California computer-products company, told me the company rarely hires people who are predominantly computer experts, favoring instead those who have a talent for teamwork and are flexible and innovative. Hewlett-Packard is such a believer in hands-on experience that since 1992 it has spent $2.6 million helping forty-five school districts build math and science skills the old-fashioned way—using real materials, such as dirt, seeds, water, glass vials, and magnets. Much the same perspective came from several recruiters in film and computer-game animation. In work by artists who have spent a lot of time on computers "you'll see a stiffness or a flatness, a lack of richness and depth," Karen Chelini, the director of human resources for LucasArts Entertainment, George Lucas's interactive-games maker, told me recently. "With traditional art training, you train the eye to pay attention to body movement. You learn attitude, feeling, expression. The ones who are good are those who as kids couldn't be without their sketchbook."

Many jobs obviously will demand basic computer skills if not sophisticated knowledge. But that doesn't mean that the parents or the teachers of young students need to panic. Joseph Weizenbaum, a professor emeritus of computer science at MIT, told the *San Jose Mercury News* that even at his technology-heavy institution new students can learn all the computer skills they need "in a summer." This seems to hold in the business world, too. Patrick MacLeamy, an executive vice-president of Hellmuth Obata & Kassabaum, the country's largest architecture firm, recently gave me numerous examples to illustrate that computers pose no threat to his company's creative work. Although architecture professors are divided on the value of computerized design tools, in MacLeamy's opinion they generally enhance the process. But

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he still considers "knowledge of the hands" to be valuable—today's architects just have to develop it in other ways. (His firm's answer is through building models.) Nonetheless, as positive as MacLeamy is about computers, he has found the company's two-week computer training to be sufficient. In fact, when he's hiring, computer skills don't enter into his list of priorities. He looks for a strong character; an ability to speak, write, and comprehend; and a rich education in the history of architecture.

The Schools That Business Built

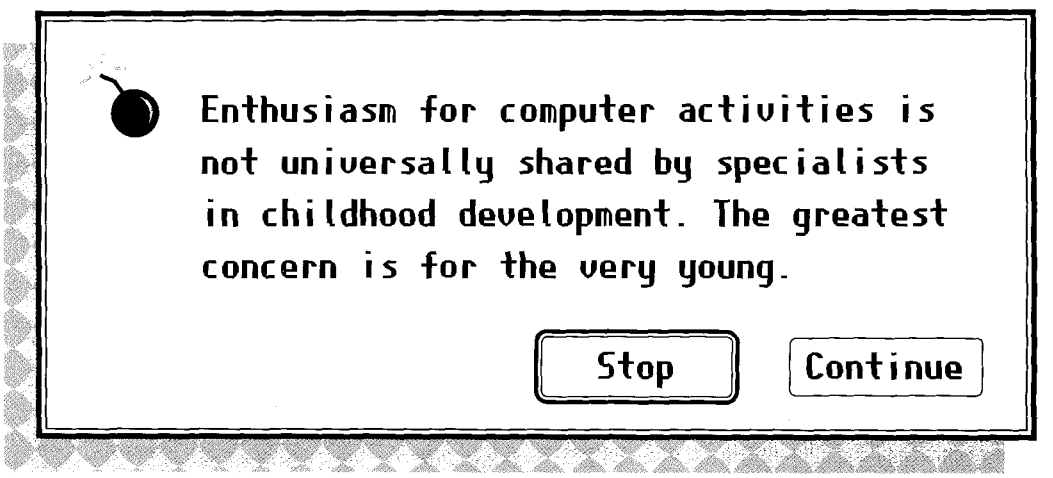
NEWSPAPER financial sections carry almost daily pronouncements from the computer industry and other businesses about their high-tech hopes for America's schoolchildren. Many of these are joined to philanthropic commitments to helping schools make curriculum changes. This sometimes gets businesspeople involved in schools, where they've begun to understand and work with the many daunting problems that are unrelated to technology. But if business gains too much influence over the curriculum, the schools can become a kind of corporate training center—largely at taxpayer expense.

For more than a decade scholars and government commissions have criticized the increasing professionalization of the college years—frowning at the way traditional liberal arts are being edged out by hot topics of the moment or strictly business-oriented studies. The schools' real job, the technology critic Neil Postman argued in his book *The End of Education* (1995), is to focus on "how to make a life, which is quite different from how to make a living." Some see the arrival of boxes of computer hardware and software in the schools as taking the commercial trend one step further, down into high school and elementary grades. "Should you be choosing a career in kindergarten?" asks Helen Sloss Luey, a social worker and a former president of San Francisco's Parent Teacher Association. "People need to be trained to learn and change, while education seems to be getting more specific."

Indeed it does. The New Technology High School in Napa (the school where a computer sits on every student's desk) was started by the school district and a consortium of more than forty businesses. "We want to be the school that business built," Robert Nolan, a founder of the school, told me last fall. "We wanted to create an environment that mimicked what exists in the high-tech business world." Increasingly, Nolan explained, business leaders want to hire people specifically trained in the skill they need. One of Nolan's partners, Ted Fujimoto, of the Landmark Consulting Group, told me that instead of just asking the business community for financial support, the school will now undertake a trade: in return for donating funds, businesses can specify what kinds of employees they want—"a two-way street." Sometimes the traffic is a bit heavy in one direction. In January, *The New York Times* published a lengthy education supplement describing numerous examples of how business is increasingly dominating school software and other curriculum materials, and not always toward purely educational goals.

People who like the idea that their taxes go to computer training might be surprised at what a poor investment it can be. Larry Cuban, the Stanford education professor, writes that changes in the classroom for which business lobbies rarely hold long-term value. Rather, they're often guided by labor-market needs that turn out to be transitory; when the economy shifts, workers are left unprepared for new jobs. In the economy as a whole, according to a recent story in *The New York Times*, performance trends in our schools have shown virtually no link to the rises and falls in the nation's measures of productivity and growth. This is one reason that school traditionalists push for broad liberal-arts curricula, which they feel develop students' values and intellect, instead of focusing on today's idea about what tomorrow's jobs will be.

High-tech proponents argue that the best education software does develop flexible business intellects. In the *Business Week* story on computer games, for example, academics and professionals expressed amazement at the speed, savvy, and facility that young computer jocks sometimes demonstrate. Several pointed in particular to computer simulations, which some business leaders believe are becoming increasingly important in fields ranging from engineering, manufacturing, and



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troubleshooting to the tracking of economic activity and geopolitical risk. The best of these simulations may be valuable, albeit for strengthening one form of thinking. But the average simulation program may be of questionable relevance.

Sherry Turkle, the sociology professor at MIT, has studied youngsters using computers for more than twenty years. In her book *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet* (1995) she described a disturbing experience with a simulation game called SimLife. After she sat down with a thirteen-year-old named Tim, she was stunned at the way

> Tim can keep playing even when he has no idea what is driving events. For example, when his sea urchins become extinct, I ask him why.
>
> Tim: "I don't know, it's just something that happens."
>
> ST: "Do you know how to find out why it happened?"
>
> Tim: "No."
>
> ST: "Do you mind that you can't tell why?"
>
> Tim: "No. I don't let things like that bother me. It's not what's important."

Anecdotes like this lead some educators to worry that as children concentrate on how to manipulate software instead of on the subject at hand, learning can diminish rather than grow. Simulations, for example, are built on hidden assumptions, many of which are oversimplified if not highly questionable. All too often, Turkle wrote recently in *The American Prospect*, "experiences with simulations do not open up questions but close them down." Turkle's concern is that software of this sort fosters passivity, ultimately dulling people's sense of what they can change in the world. There's a tendency, Turkle told me, "to take things at 'interface' value." Indeed, after mastering SimCity, a popular game about urban planning, a tenth-grade girl boasted to Turkle that she'd learned the following rule: "Raising taxes always leads to riots."

The business community also offers tangible financial support, usually by donating equipment. Welcome as this is, it can foster a high-tech habit. Once a school's computer system is set up, the companies often drop their support. This saddles the school with heavy long-term responsibilities: maintenance of the computer network and the need for constant software upgrades and constant teacher training—the full burden of which can cost far more than the initial hardware and software combined. Schools must then look for handouts from other companies, enter the grant-seeking game, or delicately go begging in their own communities. "We can go to the well only so often," Toni-Sue Passantino, the principal of the Bayside Middle School, in San Mateo, California, told me recently. Last year Bayside let a group of seventh- and eighth-graders spend eighteen months and countless hours creating a rudimentary virtual-reality program, with the support of several high-tech firms. The companies' support ended after that period, however—creating a financial speed bump of a kind that the Rand Corporation noted in a report to the Clinton Administration as a common obstacle.

School administrators may be outwardly excited about computerized instruction, but they're also shrewdly aware of these financial challenges. In March of last year, for instance, when California launched its highly promoted "NetDay '96" (a campaign to wire 12,000 California schools to the Internet in one day), school participation was far below expectations, even in technology-conscious San Francisco. In the city papers school officials wondered how they were supposed to support an Internet program when they didn't even have the money to repair crumbling buildings, install electrical outlets, and hire the dozens of new teachers recently required so as to reduce class size.

One way around the donation maze is to simplify: use inexpensive, basic software and hardware, much of which is available through recycling programs. Such frugality can offer real value in the elementary grades, especially since basic word-processing tools are most helpful to children just learning to write. Yet schools, like the rest of us, can't resist the latest toys. "A lot of people will spend all their money on fancy new equipment that can do great things, and sometimes it just gets used for typing classes," Ray Porter, a computer resource teacher for the San Francisco schools, told me recently. "Parents, school boards, and the reporters want to see only razzle-dazzle state-of-the-art."

FIELD NOTES

Death underfoot wherever you walk,
Overhead, at hand.

The bird flat on its back,
The shrew, its face sharp as a pencil.

And the bee silent upon the sill.

The spider whose web goes on snagging flies for dinner
Even after she's been bagged and eaten.

A shrew is so small,
It is amazing that it lives at all,

With a tail as long as a tirade.

—KELLY CHERRY

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Pfizer

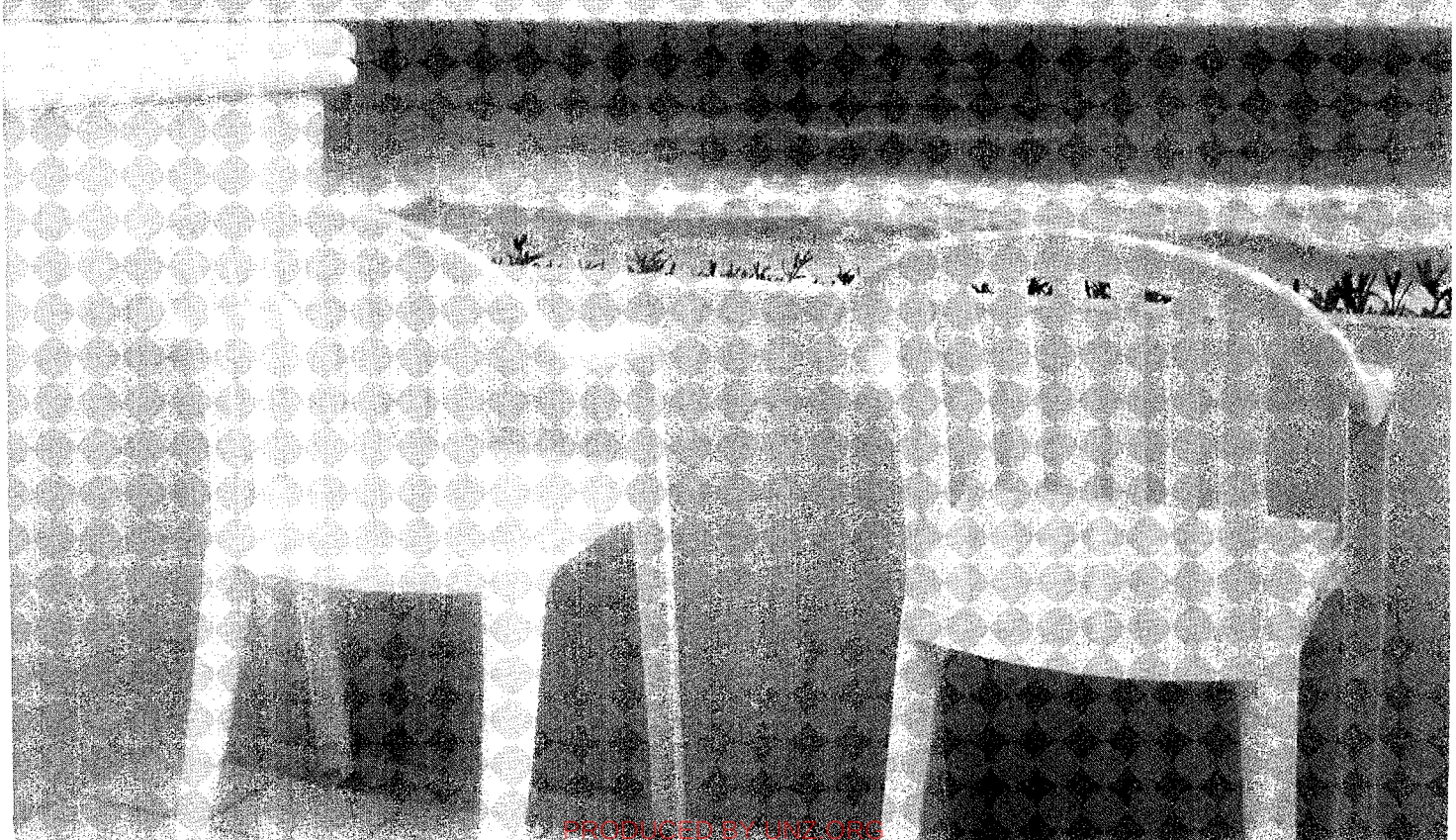
Perspectives

WHAT ABOUT

AN AGED AGE

SUNSHINE DING ON

THE SIDELINES



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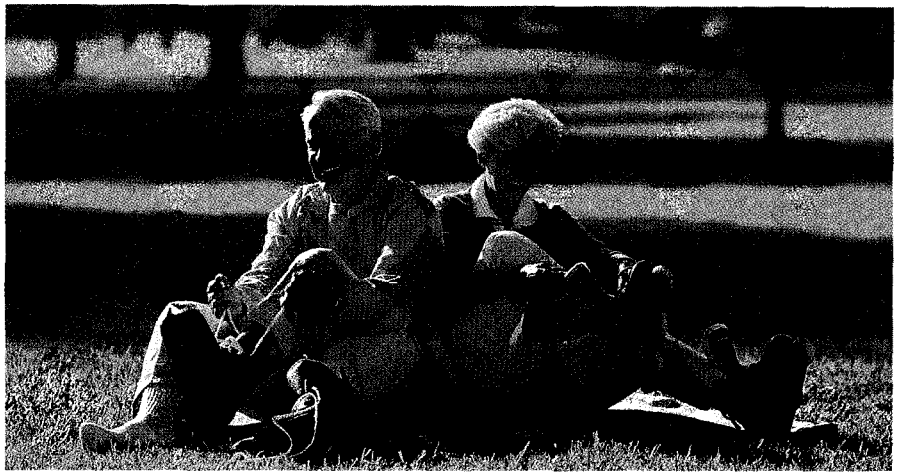

Remember when only children wore denim, middle age began at 30, 50 was "old," grandmothers wore black, and grandfathers "puttered"?

Life isn't like that anymore.

Changes in wardrobe no longer serve as mileposts on the road from childhood to maturity. Thirty generally marks the beginning of real adulthood. Fifty is middle age. Grandmothers wear whatever they feel like—often to the office—and grandfathers run corporations and marathons.

Never before has the saying "You're only as old as you feel" rung so true. For while it may be a chronological stretch to define middle age as the 50s and 60s, it's certainly an accurate definition in terms of how people feel about themselves and their lives.

And with an aging generation of Baby Boomers bidding the 50-year mark good-bye, soon more people than ever before will be in a position to experience not just middle age, but old age. Because by the year 2050, there may be as many as 30 million Americans above the age of 84, compared to 3.3 million now.

For an aging population, medical developments that would allow people to mature with greater vitality and fewer medical costs will be more important than ever.

Never before has the saying "You're only as old as you feel" rung so true.

At Pfizer, a leading global health-care company, an important portion of the medical research under way focuses on developing drugs that would help manage conditions traditionally considered to be an inevitable part of aging. Frailty, loss of mental acuity and sexual function, and heart disease are at the top of the list.

Osteoporosis is a major area of study. Commonly misperceived as a

For an aging population, medical developments that would allow people to mature with greater vitality and fewer medical costs will be more important than ever.

Prehistory	A.D. 170	1784	1789	1893	1900	1901
Life expectancy is 18 years.	The pulse is first used as a diagnostic aid.	Benjamin Franklin invents bifocals.	Life expectancy is 35.5 years.	Open heart surgery first performed.	Life expectancy is 45 years.	First electric hearing aid invented.

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problem affecting only older women, osteoporosis is actually an equal opportunity health threat. Twenty percent of the 25 million Americans who are afflicted with it are men. Currently, the disease is responsible for roughly $10 billion per year in health care and related costs. And those costs are expected to escalate to $60 billion by the year 2050.

David Thompson, Ph.D., and a group of 35 other scientists at Pfizer Central Research in Groton, Connecticut are trying to close a gap in osteoporosis therapy.

He explains: "Oral estrogen is an important treatment option for people with osteoporosis. But there is concern about potential long-term side effects."

To address this, Thompson and his group are trying to find a way to match estrogen's positive role in maintaining bone mass, while eliminating its negative effects.

Finding an improved treatment for osteoporosis is just one of Thompson's projects. His group is

1905	1928	1936	1944	1960	1965
First artificial joint used in arthritic patient's hip.	Penicillin discovered, but only available in small amounts.	First artificial heart is invented.	Pfizer is first to mass-produce penicillin; infant deaths steadily decline.	First pacemaker is invented.	First report that estrogen therapy prevents osteo-porosis in women.

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Medicine can't make you younger. But it might help you feel better about growing older.

also researching medicines that could reduce body fat, restore muscle and bone mass, and improve immune function in older people.

Of course, not all of the symptoms of aging are associated with a loss of vitality. Specific diseases attack as the years advance, and

A group of scientists headed by Dr. Ralph Stevenson at Pfizer's Central Research Facility in Groton is working to unravel the mysteries of late-onset diabetes. It's a disease that has a staggering impact on the lives of millions of people, not just in the United States, but worldwide. In

Soon more people than ever before will be in a position to experience not just middle age, but old age.

Pfizer scientists are trying to develop better treatments for a number of these illnesses.

Sandwich, England, Pfizer scientists are researching potential new treatments for urinary incontinence and benign prostatic hyperplasia, an enlargement of the prostate that affects the lives of thousands of older men.

Where will all of these efforts lead? It's far too early to tell whether any of Pfizer's research projects will lead to marketable medicines. No matter how promising a development or how much time or money has been invested in a research effort, there are no sure things.

All we know is this: The 50s and 60s have become the new middle age. The generation now entering this age group may be able to avoid many of the more difficult physical aspects of aging. Medicine can't make you younger. But it might help you feel better about growing older.

1980	1990s	
Life expectancy is 75 years.	Retirees outnumber teenagers for the first time in history.	Over the past 100 years, average life expectancy has doubled to 85.

Pfizer

We're part of the cure.

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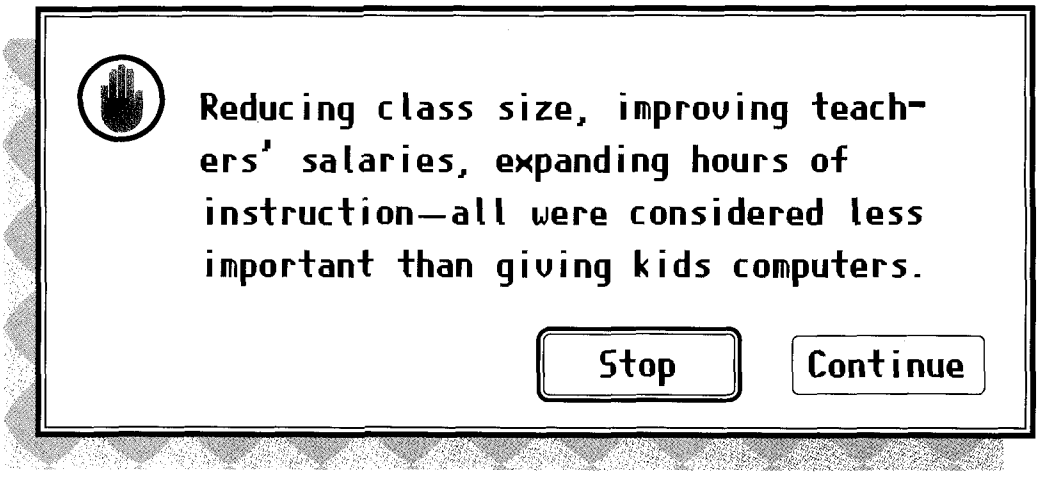
Internet Isolation

IT is hard to visit a high-tech school without being led by a teacher into a room where students are communicating with people hundreds or thousands of miles away—over the Internet or sometimes through video-conferencing systems (two-way TV sets that broadcast live from each room). Video conferences, although fun, are an expensive way to create classroom thrills. But the Internet, when used carefully, offers exciting academic prospects—most dependably, once again, for older students. In one case schools in different states have tracked bird migrations and then posted their findings on the World Wide Web, using it as their own national notebook. In San Francisco eighth-grade economics students have E-mailed Chinese and Japanese businessmen to fulfill an assignment on what it would take to build an industrial plant overseas. Schools frequently use the Web to publish student writing. While thousands of self-published materials like these have turned the Web into a worldwide vanity press, the network sometimes gives young writers their first real audience.

The free nature of Internet information also means that students are confronted with chaos, and real dangers. "The Net's beauty is that it's uncontrolled," Stephen Kerr, a professor at the College of Education at the University of Washington and the editor of *Technology in the Future of Schooling* (1996), told me. "It's information by anyone, for anyone. There's racist stuff, bigoted, hate-group stuff, filled with paranoia; bomb recipes; how to engage in various kinds of crimes, electronic and otherwise; scams and swindles. It's all there. It's all available." Older students may be sophisticated enough to separate the Net's good food from its poisons, but even the savvy can be misled. On almost any subject the Net offers a plethora of seemingly sound "research." But under close inspection much of it proves to be ill informed, or just superficial. "That's the antithesis of what classroom kids should be exposed to," Kerr said.

This makes traditionalists emphasize the enduring value of printed books, vetted as most are by editing. In many schools, however, libraries are fairly limited. I now volunteer at a San Francisco high school where the library shelves are so bare that I can see how the Internet's ever-growing number of research documents, with all their shortcomings, can sometimes be a blessing.

Even computer enthusiasts give the Net tepid reviews. "Most of the content on the Net is total garbage," Esther Dyson acknowledges. "But if you find one good thing you can use it a million times." Kerr believes that Dyson is being unrealistic. "If you find a useful site one day, it may not be there the next day, or the information is different. Teachers are being asked to jump in and figure out if what they find on the Net is worthwhile. They don't have the skill or time to do that." Especially when students rely on the Internet's much-vaunted search software. Although these tools deliver hundreds or thousands of sources within seconds, students may not realize that search engines, and the Net itself, miss important information all the time.



"We need *less* surfing in the schools, not more," David Gelernter, a professor of computer science at Yale, wrote last year in *The Weekly Standard*. "Couldn't we teach them to use what they've got before favoring them with three orders of magnitude *more*?" In my conversations with Larry Cuban, of Stanford, he argued, "Schooling is not about information. It's getting kids to think about information. It's about understanding and knowledge and wisdom."

It may be that youngsters' growing fascination with the Internet and other ways to use computers will distract from yet another of Clinton's education priorities: to build up the reading skills of American children. Sherry Dingman, an assistant professor of psychology at Marist College, in Poughkeepsie, New York, who is optimistic about many computer applications, believes that if children start using computers before they have a broad foundation in reading from books, they will be cheated out of opportunities to develop imagination. "If we think we're going to take kids who haven't been read to, and fix it by sitting them in front of a computer, we're fooling ourselves," Dingman told me not long ago. This doesn't mean that teachers or parents should resort to books on CD-ROM, which Dingman considers "a great waste of time," stuffing children's minds with "canned" images instead of stimulating youngsters to create their own. "Com-

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puters are lollipops that rot your teeth" is how Marilyn Darch, an English teacher at Poly High School, in Long Beach, California, put it in *Silicon Snake Oil*. "The kids love them. But once they get hooked. . . . It makes reading a book seem tedious. Books don't have sound effects, and their brains have to do all the work."

Computer advocates like to point out that the Internet allows for all kinds of intellectual challenges—especially when students use E-mail, or post notes in "newsgroup" discussions, to correspond with accomplished experts. Such experts, however, aren't consistently available. When they are, online "conversations" generally take place when correspondents are sitting alone, and the dialogue lacks the unpredictability and richness that occur in face-to-face discussions. In fact, when youngsters are put into groups for the "collaborative" learning that computer defenders celebrate, realistically only one child sits at the keyboard at a time. (During my school visits children tended to get quite possessive about the mouse and the keyboard, resulting in frustration and noisy disputes more often than collaboration.) In combination these constraints lead to yet another of the childhood developmentalists' concerns—that computers encourage social isolation.

Just a Glamorous Tool

IT would be easy to characterize the battle over computers as merely another chapter in the world's oldest story: humanity's natural resistance to change. But that does an injustice to the forces at work in this transformation. This is not just the future versus the past, uncertainty versus nostalgia; it is about encouraging a fundamental shift in personal priorities—a minimizing of the real, physical world in favor of an unreal "virtual" world. It is about teaching youngsters that exploring what's on a two-dimensional screen is more important than playing with real objects, or sitting down to an attentive conversation with a friend, a parent, or a teacher. By extension, it means downplaying the importance of conversation, of careful listening, and of expressing oneself in person with acuity and individuality. In the process, it may also limit the development of children's imaginations.

Perhaps this is why Steven Jobs, one of the founders of Apple Computer and a man who claims to have "spearheaded giving away more computer equipment to schools than anybody else on the planet," has come to a grim conclusion: "What's wrong with education cannot be fixed with technology," he told *Wired* magazine last year. "No amount of technology will make a dent. . . . You're not going to solve the problems by putting all knowledge onto CD-ROMs. We can put a Web site in every school—none of this is bad. It's bad only if it lulls us into thinking we're doing something to solve the problem with education." Jane David, the consultant to Apple, concurs, with a commonly heard caveat. "There are real dangers," she told me, "in looking to technology to be the savior of education. But it won't survive without the technology."

Arguments like David's remind Clifford Stoll of yesteryear's promises about television. He wrote in *Silicon Snake Oil*,

> "Sesame Street" . . . has been around for twenty years. Indeed, its idea of making learning relevant to all was as widely promoted in the seventies as the Internet is today.
>
> So where's that demographic wave of creative and brilliant students now entering college? Did kids really need to learn how to watch television? Did we inflate their expectations that learning would always be colorful and fun?

Computer enthusiasts insist that the computer's "interactivity" and multimedia features make this machine far superior to television. Nonetheless, Stoll wrote,

> I see a parallel between the goals of "Sesame Street" and those of children's computing. Both are pervasive, expensive and encourage children to sit still. Both display animated cartoons, gaudy numbers and weird, random noises. . . . Both give the sensation that by merely watching a screen, you can acquire information without work and without discipline.

As the technology critic Neil Postman put it to a Harvard electronic-media conference, "I thought that television would be the last great technology that people would go into with their eyes closed. Now you have the computer."

The solution is not to ban computers from classrooms altogether. But it may be to ban federal spending on what is fast becoming an overheated campaign. After all, the private sector, with its constant supply of used computers and the computer industry's vigorous competition for new customers, seems well equipped to handle the situation. In fact, if schools can impose some limits—on technology donors and on themselves—rather than indulging in a consumer frenzy, most will probably find themselves with more electronic gear than they need. That could free the billions that Clinton wants to devote to technology and make it available for impoverished fundamentals: teaching solid skills in reading, thinking, listening, and talking; organizing inventive field trips and other rich hands-on experiences; and, of course, building up the nation's core of knowledgeable, inspiring teachers. These notions are considerably less glamorous than computers are, but their worth is firmly proved through a long history.

Last fall, after the school administrators in Mansfield, Massachusetts, had eliminated proposed art, music, and physical-education positions in favor of buying computers, Michael Bellino, an electrical engineer at Boston University's Center for Space Physics, appeared before the Massachusetts Board of Education to protest. "The purpose of the schools [is] to, as one teacher argues, 'Teach carpentry, not hammer,'" he testified. "We need to teach the whys and ways of the world. Tools come and tools go. Teaching our children tools limits their knowledge to these tools and hence limits their futures."

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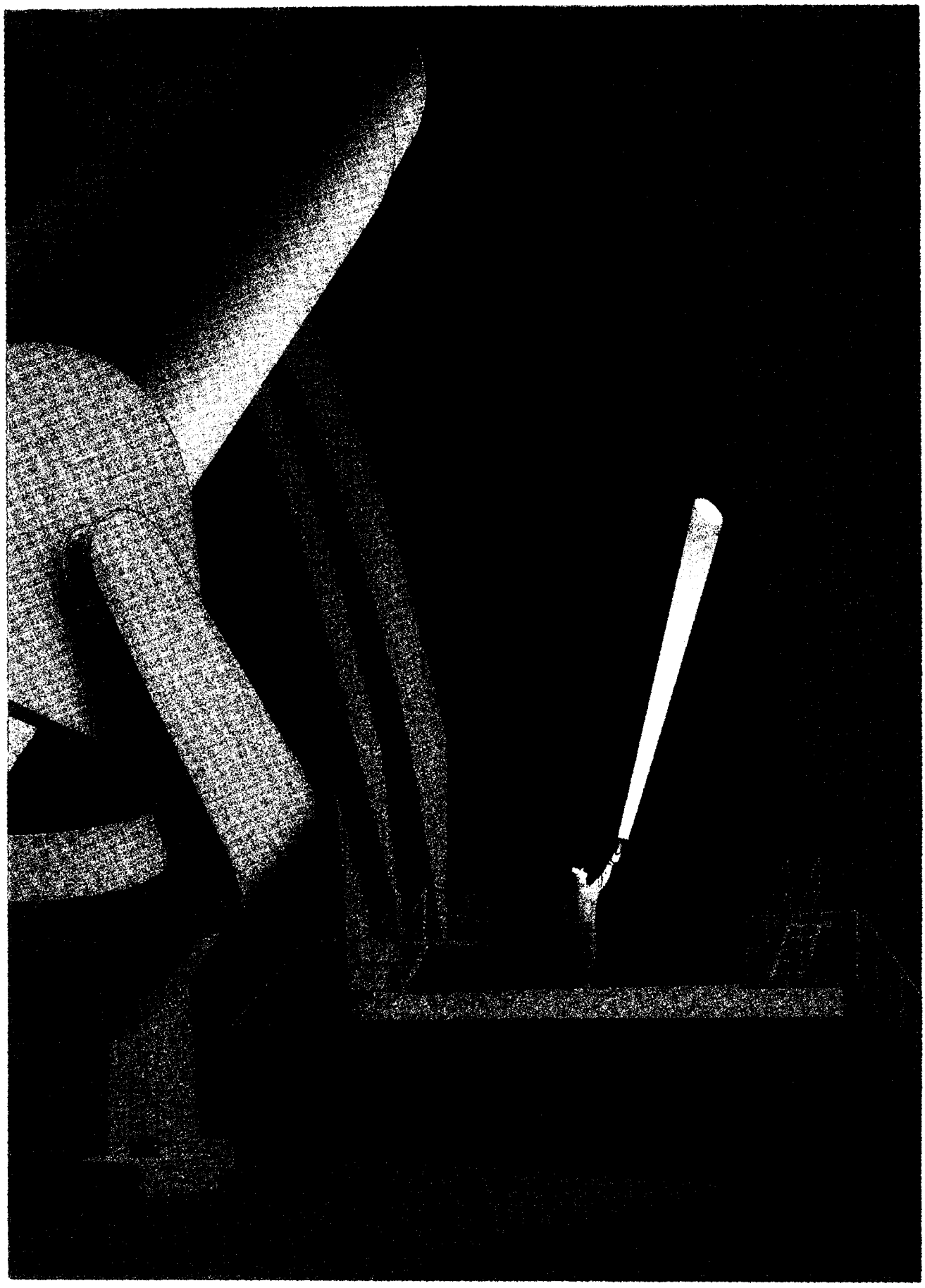

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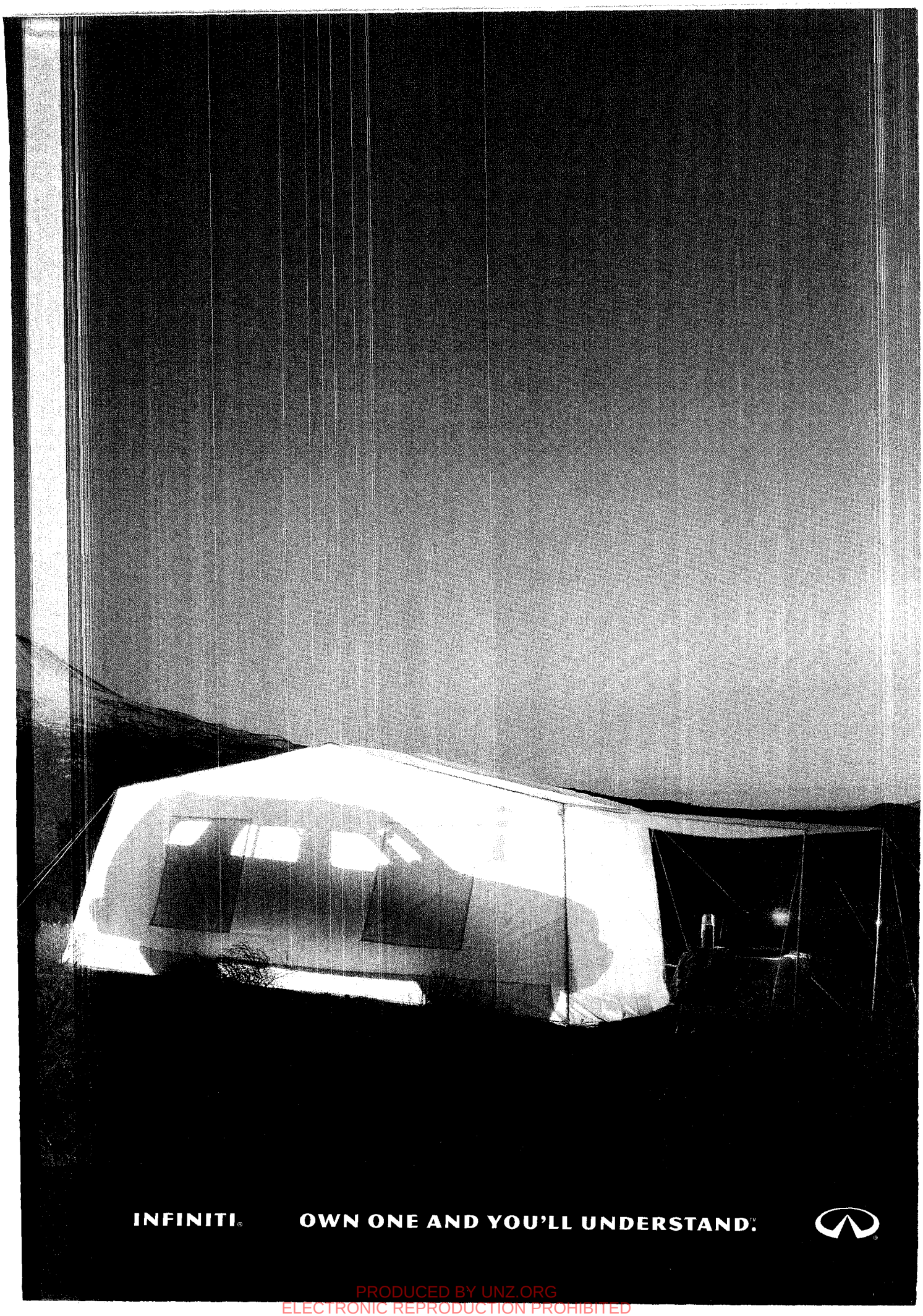

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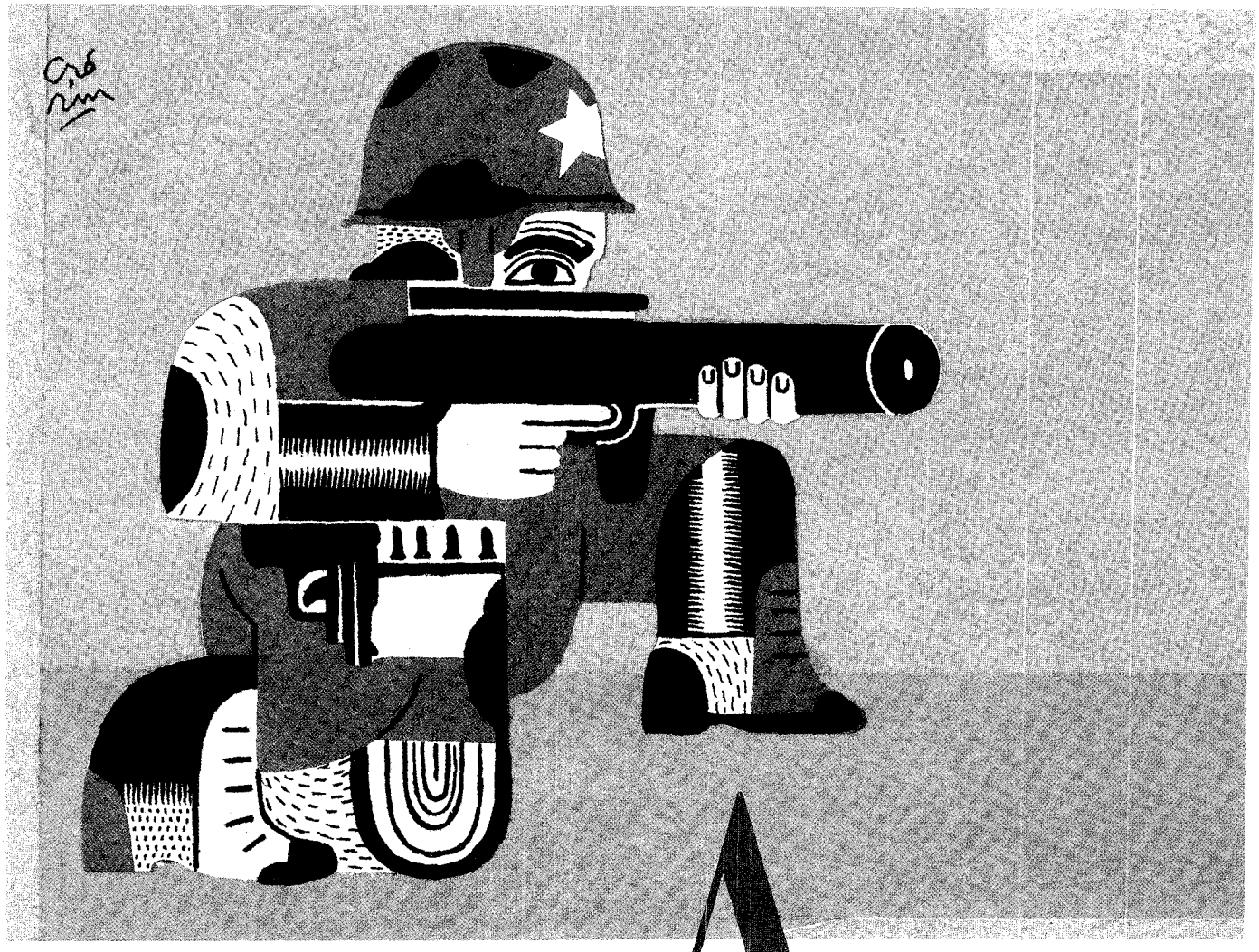
THE WIDENING GAP BETWEEN



by

THOMAS E. RICKS

U.S. military personnel of all ranks are feeling increasingly alienated from their own country, and are becoming both more conservative and more politically active than ever before. Do they see America clearly?

AFTER following a platoon of Marine recruits through eleven weeks of boot-camp training on Parris Island in the spring of 1995, I was stunned to see, when they went home for postgraduation leave, how alienated they felt from their old lives. At various times each of these new Marines seemed to experience a moment of private loathing for public America. They were repulsed by the physical unfitness of civilians, by the uncouth behavior they witnessed, and by what they saw as pervasive selfishness and consumerism. Many found themselves avoiding old friends, and some experienced difficulty even in communicating with their families.

One typical member of Platoon 3086, Craig Hoover, reported that the Amtrak ride home to Kensington, Maryland, was "horrible." The train was "filled with smoke," he said.

Illustrations by Brian Cronin

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THE MILITARY AND SOCIETY

"People were drinking and their kids were running around aimlessly. You felt like smacking around some people." (An article I published in *The Wall Street Journal* in July, 1995, mentioned many of the recruits quoted here.) Hoover also found the train ride a sad contrast to the relative racial harmony of Parris Island. "It felt kind of segregated by race and class—a poor white car, a poor black car, a middle-class white car, a middle-class black car." Even McDonald's—which had become a fantasy-like symbol to the recruits as they ate military rations, particularly during a week of training in the woods—proved to be a letdown. "You look around and notice that a lot of the civilians are overweight, and a little sloppy," Hoover said.

Jonathan Prish, a former white supremacist, went with old friends to a bar in Mobile, Alabama. "We played pool and drank," he reported, in a typical comment. "It seemed like everyone there was losers. All they want to do is get smashed. They're self-destructive. They're not trying. They're just goofing around."

In the wealthy Washington suburb of Potomac, Maryland, Eric Didier felt the same way. "There are some friends I've stayed away from," he said. "They're not going anywhere, and I don't want to be around them. We don't have any common ground." Though they are in their early twenties, he said, "they're not doing anything, living at home, not working, not studying."

In Pittsburgh, Patrick Bayton went to a Saturday-night party where he saw two old friends as "losers." "Everything feels different," he said. "I can't stand half my friends no more." Frank DeMarco attended a street fair in Bayonne, New Jersey. "It was crowded. Trash everywhere. People were drinking, getting into fights. People with obnoxious attitudes, no politeness whatsoever." But, he said, "I didn't let it get to me. I just said, 'This is the way civilian life is: nasty.'"

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Yet the member of Platoon 3086 perhaps most at odds with his former environment was Daniel Keane, whose background was probably the most privileged. The son of a Merrill Lynch & Co. executive, Keane seemed almost in pain when I interviewed him in the living room of his parents' house, in Summit, New Jersey. When he first got home from Parris Island, he said about being with his family, "I didn't know how to act. They said, 'What do you want to do?' I'd say, 'I don't know.' I didn't know how to carry on a conversation."

He found his old peer group even more difficult. "All my friends are home from college now, drinking, acting stupid and loud," the eighteen-year-old Marine said. He was particularly disappointed when two old friends refused to postpone smoking marijuana for a few minutes, until he was away from them. "They were getting ready to smoke their weed. I said, 'Could you just hang on for a minute? Can't you wait till you get to the party instead of smoking in the car?' They said, 'Then we'd have to give it out.'" So, he recalled, they lit up in front of their Marine friend. "I was pretty disappointed in them doing that. It made me want to be at SOI [the Marines' School of Infantry]."

Like many other members of 3086, Keane felt as if he had joined a cult or religion. "People don't understand," he told me, "and I'm not going to waste my breath trying to explain when the only thing that really impresses them is how much beer you can chug down in thirty seconds."

THE GAP

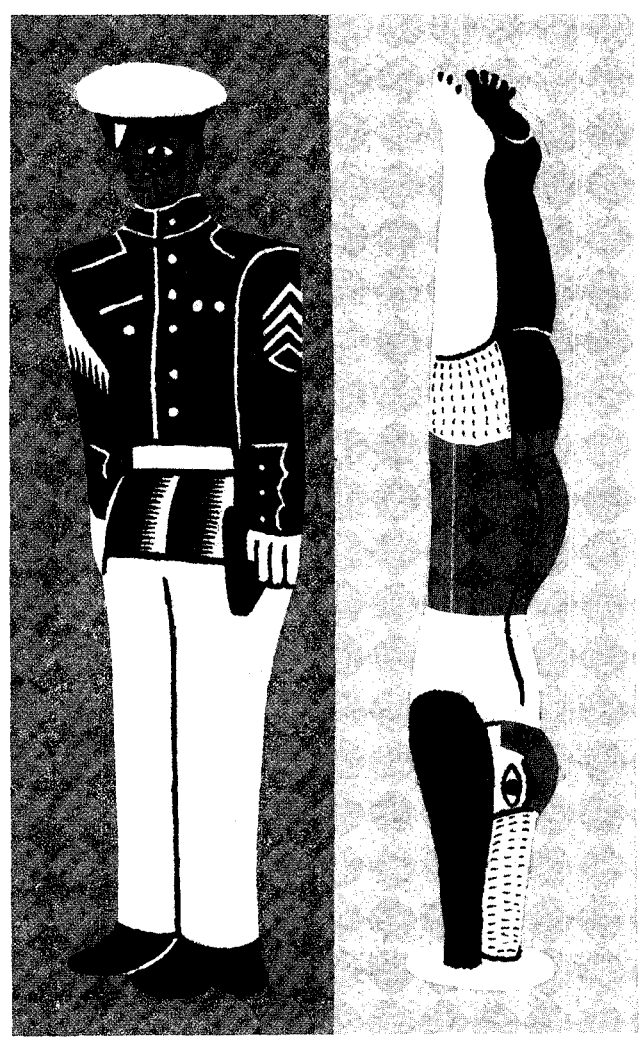
I THINK the Marines of Platoon 3086 were experiencing in a very personal way the widening gap between today's military and civilian America. To be sure, their reaction was exaggerated by the boot-camp experience, during which the Marine Corps especially among the services tries to sever a recruit's ties to his or her previous life. But because of the nature of American society today, the re-entry shock upon leaving recruit training appears to be greater now than it was in the past. Asked to explain this difference, retired Marine Lieutenant General Bernard Trainor said, "When I got out of boot camp, in 1946, society was different. It was more disciplined, and most Americans trusted the government. Most males had some military experience. It was an entirely different society—one that thought more about its responsibilities than its rights."

Similarly, Sergeant Major James Moore, now retired but at that time the senior sergeant on Parris Island, commented, "It is difficult to go back into a society of 'What's in it for me?' when a Marine has been taught the opposite for so long. When I look at society today, I see a group of young people without direction because of the lack of teaching of moral values at home and in school. We see that when we get them in recruit training. The recruits are smarter today—they run rings around what we were able to do, on average. Their problems are moral problems: lying, cheating, and stealing, and the very fact of being committed. We find that to get young people to dedicate themselves to a cause is difficult sometimes."

The idea of a gap between the military and civilian America is hardly new. For much of the nation's history, Samuel Huntington wrote in *The Soldier and the State* (1957), the U.S. military has had "the outlook of an estranged minority." A decade ago the journalist Arthur Hadley called this strained civilian-military relationship "The Great Divorce." In *The Straw Giant: Triumph and Failure—America's Armed Forces* (1986) he defined this as "the less-than-amicable separation of the military from the financial, business, political, and intellectual elites of this country, particularly from the last two."

Today's fragmented society self-discipline, and considering

The fact that most Americans pay attention to the military only when they see news of a sexual-abuse scan-



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dal, such as the one at Aberdeen Proving Ground, underscores that separation. As far as media coverage is concerned, the U.S. military has fallen to the level of a mid-sized Asian nation that breaks onto the front page with a large disaster but gets just a few paragraphs for bus plunges and plane crashes. The estrangement appears to be more complete now than it was in the past, for, I think, two overarching reasons. First, more than twenty years after the end of conscription the ignorance of American elites about the military has deepened. Second, with the end of the Cold War the United States has entered into historically unexplored territory. If the Cold War is indeed considered to have been a kind of war, then for the first time in American history the nation is maintaining a large military establishment during peacetime, with 1.5 million people on active duty and millions more serving in reserve and supporting civilian roles in the Defense Department and the defense industry.

sion-making in the United States that civilians are now apparently less able "to get the military to do what they want them to do" than they were during the Cold War.

Three broad areas need to be examined to understand why this political, social, and cultural gap appears to be widening: changes in the military, changes in civilian society, and changes in the international-security environment.

CHANGES IN THE MILITARY

BY far the most important change that has taken place in the military is the termination of the draft in 1973. Twenty-four years later the consequences are still unfolding. Today all 1.5 million people on active duty are volunteers. That fact carries vast implications for how the military operates and how it relates to society. In contrast to the post–Second World War demobilization, for example, the post–Cold War drawdown is being met with fierce resistance by many soldiers, because all volunteered to be in the military and most are indeed fighting to stay in.

is at odds with the classic military values of sacrifice, unity, the interests of the group before those of the individual.

Several trends already under way in civilian society and in the post–Cold War military threaten to widen the gap in the coming years, further isolating and alienating the military. In his 1974 prologue to the revised edition of *The Professional Soldier*, Morris Janowitz concluded confidently that there would not be "a return to earlier forms of a highly self-contained and socially distinct military force; the requirements of technology of education and of political support make that impossible." But the conditions that shaped the military of which Janowitz wrote no longer obtain. It now appears not only possible but likely that over the next twenty years the U.S. military will revert to a kind of garrison status, largely self-contained and increasingly distinct as a society and subculture. "Today," says retired Admiral Stanley Arthur, who commanded U.S. naval forces during the Gulf War, "the armed forces are no longer representative of the people they serve. More and more, enlisted [men and women] as well as officers are beginning to feel that they are special, better than the society they serve. This is not healthy in an armed force serving a democracy."

In this light, the Clinton Administration's frictions with the military—over gays in the armed forces, the alleged "dissing" of a uniformed general by a White House aide, military resentment at the Administration's ham-handedness in the later phases of the Somalia mission, and military resistance to U.S. interventions in Haiti and Bosnia—can be seen not as the unique product of the personal histories of one President and his advisers but as a precursor of future problems. The Harvard political scientist Michael Desch concluded in a recent assessment of post–Cold War deci-

Partly as a result of the end of conscription, the past fifteen years especially has seen the rise of a professional military, even in the enlisted ranks. Although better trained as soldiers and more stable as a society, these professionals are very expensive, because they bring with them families and all the attendant social infrastructure, from health care to substance-abuse counseling to higher education on military bases. John Luddy, a Senate Republican aide, wrote that family-related costs to the Defense Department total more than $25 billion a year.

This strong social safety net may not be sustained. With defense-policy analysts in general agreement that a severe defense-budget problem looms in the late 1990s, the military's vast social infrastructure is likely to come under attack by Congress. The military—especially the Army, which is the most vulnerable of the services in terms of personnel—faces a dilemma in addressing those cuts. The social safety net appears necessary to support a professional military with a high "operating tempo." But to find the funds to maintain that net, the Army is likely to be required to take cuts in personnel far beyond what it will consider tolerable. Either course—curtailing support for personnel or curtailing personnel—is likely to engender resentment in the military.

The post-draft professionalization of the military has also wrought cultural changes. Richard H. Kohn, a former chief historian of the Air Force who now teaches at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, argues that the officer

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corps has changed since the Cold War in the way it acts and feels. "I sense an ethos that is different," he told me in an interview. "They talk about themselves as 'we,' separate from society. They see themselves as different, morally and culturally. It isn't the military of the fifties and sixties, which was a large, semi-mobilized citizen military establishment, with a lot of younger officers who were there temporarily, and a base of draftees." Change in the military culture aside, the American people have never been comfortable with professional militaries, as Huntington observed in *The Soldier and the State*—theirs or anybody else's.

> The Revolutionary War was described as a war of citizen-soldiers against the standing armies and mercenaries of George III. The Civil War was [the Union fighting] against the West Point directed armies of the South. . . . German militarism was the principal enemy in World War I. . . . The professionals, in other words, are always on the other side.

A second major area of change in the military is the rebuilding that has occurred since the Vietnam War. In this area, as in many other aspects of defense nowadays, the Marine Corps appears to be exemplary. During the 1970s the Corps was a disaster. Drug use was rampant and discipline ragged. There were 1,060 violent racial incidents in the Corps in 1970. Jeffrey Record noted in the May, 1995, *Proceedings*, the magazine of the Navy's professional society, that during the Vietnam era

> the Corps registered rates of courts-martial, non-judicial punishments, unauthorized absences, and outright desertions unprecedented in its own history, and, in most cases, three to four times those plaguing the U.S. Army. Violence and crime at recruit depots and other installations escalated; in some cases, officers ventured out only in pairs or groups and only in daylight.

Today the Marine Corps has drastically reduced its discipline problems. Its drug problem, too, is minor, with less than four percent of Marines testing positive in random urinalysis. And although racial tension still exists in the military, the services, especially the Army, have probably done about as good a job of minimizing the issue of race as is possible in the American context. In the Army's officer corps of 78,000, there are now some 9,000 blacks. As Charles Moskos, a military sociologist at Northwestern University, has observed, the U.S. military is still the only place in American society where it is routine for black people to boss around white people. (This may be one reason the black drill instructor has become a stock figure in American popular culture, not only in films such as *Private Benjamin*, *An Officer and a Gentleman*, *Major Payne*, *Renaissance Man*, and *In the Army Now* but also in commercials for beer and long-distance telephone services.)

In addition, two related post–Cold War trends having to do with the military's infrastructure may have had important consequences for civilian-military relations. These are the process of closing unneeded bases and the privatization of many functions of logistics and maintenance.

The many base closings may increase the geographical and political isolation of the military—or, to put it another way, may return the military to its pre–Second World War condition. "Before World War II, the majority of the military posts were located in the South and in the West," Janowitz notes. Also earlier in this century the South was disproportionately represented in the ranks of senior officers—in 1910 some 90 percent of Army generals had a "southern affiliation," Janowitz reports. The closing of bases has so far hit especially hard in the Far West and the Northeast—areas that are both more liberal and more expensive to live in and operate in than the rest of the nation.

The move to privatize much of the military's huge depot structure—the network that maintains aircraft, vehicles, and other defense gear—may also contribute to the social and political isolation of the military. Faced with the need to cut personnel, and seeking to preserve its war-fighting "tooth," the post–Cold War military has sought to privatize much of its support "tail." This privatization, which promises to reduce the number of soldiers in civilian occupations, is occurring not only on U.S. soil, where maintenance work is being farmed out to corporations, but also in other countries where U.S. soldiers operate. In Somalia, Haiti, and Bosnia, for example, Brown & Root has performed a host of functions once done or at least supervised by the uniformed military, from staffing mess halls to purifying water to preparing the bodies of soldiers killed in firefights for shipment home. A concern relating to extensive civilian contracting is that military personnel today are less likely to be serving in occupations that have civilian equivalents, and are more likely to specialize in military skills that are neither transferable to the civilian sector nor well understood by civilians.

THESE isolating trends are occurring amid broader cultural changes in the military—notably the politicization of the officer corps. Of course, military culture has always had a conservative streak, just as journalism has always had an element of anti-authoritarianism. I suspect, however, that today's officers are both more conservative and more politically active than their predecessors.

Admittedly, the evidence is hazy and the data are skimpy—in part because "conservative" is almost impossible to define. Nonetheless, the few indications available today are strikingly at odds with the conclusions Janowitz reached. Janowitz found that many officers continued to avoid open party preferences, but also detected a trend toward more liberals among military officers. He found the military becoming more representative of society, with a long-term upward trend in the number of officers "willing to deviate from traditional conservative identification." And he detected a correlation between higher ranks and greater intensity of conservative attitudes.

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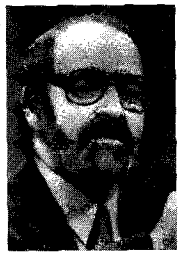

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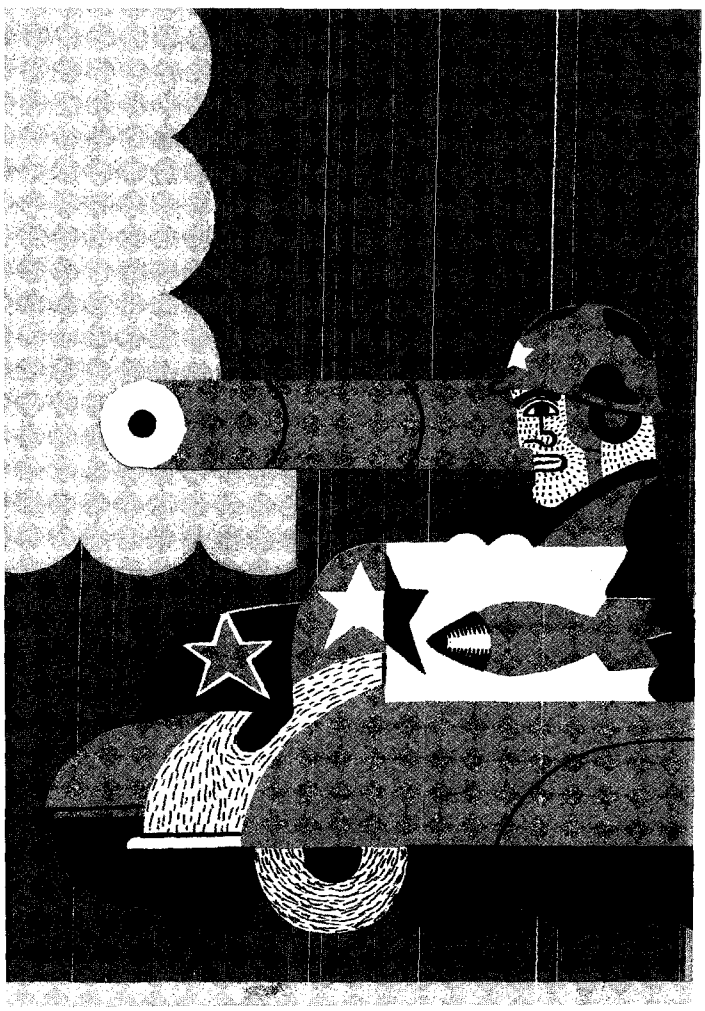
Today the available evidence indicates that all these trends have reversed. The military appears to be becoming politically less representative of society, with a long-term downward trend in the number of officers willing to identify themselves as liberals. Open identification with the Republican Party is becoming the norm. And the few remaining liberals in uniform tend to be colonels and generals, perhaps because they began their careers in the draft-era military. The junior officer corps, apart from its female and minority members, appears to be overwhelmingly hard-right Republican and largely comfortable with the views of Rush Limbaugh. Air Force Colonel Charles Dunlap observed in a recent essay published by the Air Force Academy, "Many officers privately expressed delight that" as a result of the controversy over gays in the military, the Reserve Officers Training Corps program is producing "fewer officers from the more liberal campuses to challenge [the Air Force officers'] increasingly right-wing philosophy."

A variety of recent formal and informal surveys point toward those conclusions. Midshipmen at Annapolis, who in 1974 were similar in their politics to their peers at civilian colleges, are now twice as likely as other students to consider themselves conservative, according to an unpublished internal Navy survey. "The shift to the right has been rather remarkable, even while there has been an infusion of rather more liberal women and minorities," one of the study's conductors concluded.

Former Army Major Dana Isaacoff, who taught at West Point in the early 1990s, routinely surveyed her students on their politics, assessing about sixty of them during each of six semesters. In a typical section, she reported in a talk last year at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, seventeen would identify themselves as Republican, but none would label themselves Democratic or Independent, instead choosing the traditional course of adopting no political label. She concluded that to today's West Point cadets, being a Republican is becoming part of the definition of being a military officer. "Students overwhelmingly identified themselves as conservatives," she said. Here the definition of conservatism is important: this does not appear to be the compromising, solution-oriented politics of, say, Bob Dole. "There is a tendency among the cadets to adopt the mainstream conservative attitudes and push them to extremes," Isaacoff said. "The Democratic-controlled Congress was Public Enemy Number One. Number Two was the liberal media. . . . They firmly believed in the existence of the Welfare Queen."

This tendency toward right-wing attitudes is not limited to malleable students at military academies. A 1995 survey of Marine officers at Quantico, a large base in Virginia that focuses on training officers, found similar views. The Marines are not the most representative example, but because they are the most tradition-bound and unabashedly culturally conservative of the services, they are the most dramatic. They should be viewed as an indicator not of where the U.S. military is today but of where it is heading. The Corps was less altered by the Cold War than any of the other services. With the end of the Cold War the other services are becoming more like the Marines: smaller, insular, and expeditionary.

In the Quantico survey 50 percent of the new officers studying at the Basic School identified themselves as conservatives. In a parallel survey of mid-career officers at the Command and Staff College 69 percent identified themselves as conservatives. In a striking indication of alienation from civilian society, an overwhelming proportion of the



Basic School lieutenants—81 percent—said that the military's values are closer to the values of the Founding Fathers than are the values of civilian society. At the Command and Staff College, where students generally have at least ten years of military experience, 64 percent agreed with that statement. A majority of officers at both schools agreed that a gap exists between the military and civilian society, and stated that they expect it to increase with the passage of time. Fewer than half believed it desirable to have people with different political views within their organizations.

"I believe these results indicate the potential for a serious

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problem in civil-military relations for the United States," concluded Army Major Robert A. Newton, who conducted the survey of Marine officers and analyzed the responses. "Instead of viewing themselves as the representatives of society," he wrote, "the participating officers believe they are a unique element within society."

Again, officers today appear to be not only more conservative than those in the past but also more active in politics—both in how they describe themselves and in how they vote. This change is all the more striking because traditionally the American military has avoided political involvement. After

the Civil War, Huntington wrote in *The Soldier and the State*, "not one officer in five hundred, it was estimated, ever cast a ballot." In *Once an Eagle* (1968), an illuminating novel about the twentieth-century U.S. Army, Anton Myrer has his young hero tell a congressman, "When I serve my country as a soldier I'm not going to serve her as a Democrat or as a Republican, I'm going to serve her as an American." But military personnel have for the past decade been voting in greater percentages than the general population. In his survey of Marine officers Newton found that "although the majority of the officers did not believe the military should play an active role in political decisions, a significant minority did believe such activity was appropriate."

It is worth noting that the past two chairmen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff have entered election-year debates on issues touching on the military. During the 1992 election General Colin Powell twice spoke out against military intervention in Bosnia, which candidate Bill Clinton was proposing. Less noticed, Powell's comparatively retiring successor, General John Shalikashvili, spoke out during the 1996 presidential-primary season against isolationism and anti-immigrationism—two issues the Republican candidate Pat Buchanan was promoting.

An odd little book titled *Clint McQuade USMC: The New Beginning* (1990) is perhaps unintentionally revealing. Reading this novel—which was privately published by the author, Gene Duncan, a retired Marine major—feels like taking a spelunking trip through the collective unconscious of the Corps. Indeed, Duncan states at the outset that any resemblance to real people "springs from my subconscious, over which I have no control." The book is about a retired Marine master gunnery sergeant who is reborn with the body of a sixteen-year-old while retaining the knowledge, memories, and experience of his old self. He eventually—of course—joins the Marines.

The book is most interesting for what it asserts as a matter of course: essentially that American society is decaying, corrupted, misled by its elected officials, and deserving of resentment from the Marines who protect it. "Americans are selfish people," the hero explains to his buddies. Later he tells them, "I think I have lost all faith in our politicians, so I take the narrow view and confine it to those around me of like mind, minds which dictate unselfishness and honor." In a postscript the author says that his "purpose in writing" has been to "give to the reader a sense of the heart of the United States Marine Corps." He explains that he has tried to show the Marines to be "special people with special hearts who serve a seemingly ungrateful nation."

The novel shows part of the military talking to itself when it doesn't think it is being overheard. Though hardly famous in the outside world, Gene Duncan is well known within the Marines: his books are sold by the Marine Corps Association, which at its Quantico bookshop has a special "Duncan's Books" area. The 1991 edition of *General Military Subjects*, the textbook used to train all recruits at Parris Island, quotes Duncan on its inside cover as saying that the job of a drill instructor is to undo "eighteen years of cumulative selfishness and 'Me-ism.'" Just after the table of contents the textbook gives Duncan a full page. The only other person so honored in the entire 199-page textbook is President George Bush.

These isolating attitudes, while perhaps most extreme in the Marines, are also found in varying degrees elsewhere in the military. "There is a deep-seated suspicion in the U.S. military of society," Andrew Bacevich, a retired Army colonel who is the executive director of the Foreign Policy

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Institute at Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies, told me in an interview. It is "part of the Vietnam hangover—'You guys betrayed us once, and you could do it again.'" This suspicion, he added, "isn't going away, it's being transmitted" to a new generation of officers.

Here again the long-term consequences of the end of conscription are still unfolding. It has become easier for the middle class in general and liberals in particular to follow their traditional impulse to turn away from the military. Within the military the end of the draft has also meant the end of its leavening effect: people from nonmilitary families were conscripted or spurred by the draft to enroll in ROTC, and found they actually liked military life. General Powell, for example, came from a nonmilitary background and attended the distinctly nonmilitary City University of New York. General Shalikashvili was a draftee. In some years of the early 1990s the Joint Chiefs contained more members who had come out of public universities than members who had gone the traditional routes of West Point, Annapolis, and the Air Force Academy. But the generation of draft-era officers is now retiring, and it is a virtual certainty that in twenty years the chairman of the Joint Chiefs will be a volunteer. All this will make it easier for the military and the liberal professionals of the middle class to look upon each other with contempt.

It is one matter to acknowledge that much in American society today is deserving of contempt. It is another matter to propose that the role of the U.S. military—especially an all-volunteer professional military oriented toward conservative Republicanism—is to fix those problems. Yet that is what some are doing. "It is no longer enough for Marines to 'reflect' the society they defend," Michael Wyly, a retired colonel, advised in the March, 1995, issue of the *Marine Corps Gazette*. "They must lead it, not politically but culturally. For it is the culture we are defending."

In some ways this is nothing new. The military can be seen as just reverting to its pre–Second World War and pre–Cold War stances—socially isolated, politically conservative, and working primarily on bases in the South and West. In *The Professional Soldier*, Janowitz wrote, "Military ideology has maintained a disapproval of the lack of order and respect for authority which it feels characterizes civilian society. . . . In the past most professional soldiers even felt that the moral fibre of American manpower was 'degenerating' and might not be able to withstand the rigors of battle."

There are two important differences between today's military and the military before the Second World War. First, it is far larger—some six times the size of the 244,000-man active-duty military of 1933. (Over the same period the U.S. population has merely doubled in size.) Second, it is frequently used as an instrument of national policy, as it was with the recent large deployments to Somalia, Haiti, and Bosnia. Possibly a third major difference is its quality: for the first time in the nation's history the U.S. military is generally regarded as the best in the world. If, as now appears likely, it is cut significantly over the next ten years, frustrated officers may be more politically direct in expressing their resentment than they were in the past. It would be surprising if all were to adopt the stance of General Omar Bradley, who in a passage quoted by Janowitz commented, "Thirty-two years in the peacetime army had taught me to do my job, hold my tongue, and keep my name out of the papers."

CHANGES IN SOCIETY

THERE is widespread agreement that over the past few decades American society has become more fragmented, more individualistic, and less disciplined, with institutions such as church, family, and school wielding less influence. Whatever the implications of these changes, they put society at odds with the classic military values of sacrifice, unity, self-discipline, and considering the interests of the group before those of the individual.

The split is all the deeper because the military has effectively addressed the two great plagues of American society, drug abuse and racial tension, but civilian society has not. In addition, the military is doing a better job in other areas where society is faltering, including education. The Army especially has done well with the growth of realistic training at facilities such as the National Training Center, the Joint Readiness Training Center, and the Combat Maneuver Training Center, where soldiers live in the field and conduct bloodless battles against well-trained opponents. Younger enlisted soldiers and Marines frequently exude an air of competence that is rare in today's eighteen- and nineteen-year-old civilians. Local military recruiters report that they no longer recruit from certain high schools, because so few of the graduates of those schools are able to pass the military entrance examination—the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery, a simple test of reading, writing, and arithmetic skills. The result of this selectivity is that the military is now far better educated than the general population: about 96 percent of recruits in 1995, for example, earned high school diplomas, as compared with 79 percent of civilians aged eighteen to twenty-four. Indeed, about 40 percent of all officers now hold postgraduate degrees.

The end of the draft has altered the way society looks at the military. Charles Moskos traces the American people's supposed intolerance of casualties to the end of the draft: because the elites aren't putting their own offspring in harm's way, the American people mistrust their sending everyone else's children into battle. I disagree with this analysis, and am instead persuaded by the explanation put forward by James Burk, a professor of sociology at Texas A&M University, that the American people will not tolerate casualties when they dislike a policy or don't understand it, as was true with Somalia.

But I think that Moskos is pointing in the right direction:

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American political and economic elites generally don't understand the military. A comment published this spring in the *Utne Reader*—the *Reader's Digest* of the New Age crowd—captured the disdain for today's military. In an editorial introduction to an article the magazine stated that in light of the Tailhook and Aberdeen scandals, "it's hard to imagine why any woman—or any man with a conscience—would want to join the military."

Nor is such understanding deemed important, even in making national-security policy. Consider, for example, the conspicuous lack in the White House of staff members with military experience—in an Administration that has proved to be militarily activist. Even after bungling an inherited mission in Somalia and then using U.S. forces to feed Rwandan refugees, invade Haiti, and enforce a peace agreement in Bosnia, the Clinton Administration did not see fit to follow Pentagon suggestions that it appoint someone with a military background to a senior post on the National Security Council. Misunderstanding the military is dangerous for both the military and the civilian population. Nowadays, I think, policymakers tend to overestimate what the military can do. It isn't clear, for example, just how the Clinton Administration expects the appointment of a four-star general, Barry McCaffrey, as drug czar to revitalize its efforts against drugs. Overestimating the military is probably even more dangerous than believing that it is made up of incompetent buffoons, as Baby Boomers seemed to believe in the 1970s.

An uncertain grasp of military affairs is likely to characterize policymaking for the foreseeable future. As recently as during the Vietnam War two thirds of the members of Congress were veterans. Today almost two thirds are not. What most congressmen know of the military is what they saw on television during the Gulf War. They learned two lessons: high-tech weaponry works, and the United States needs missile defenses. Partly because the Army effectively blacked out media coverage of its Gulf War triumph, Congress came away with little interest in training, personnel issues, or ground forces in general. It should have been no surprise to the military that after the Republicans won a majority in Congress in 1994, they advocated missile defenses and B-2 bombers while trying to cut military pensions. In March of last year several younger members of Congress formed the Republican Defense Working Group, which, they said, would "scour the defense budget for savings." As Andrew Bacevich has observed, it will be interesting to see how the political beliefs of the officer corps change when officers realize that to be conservative is no longer necessarily to be in favor of defense spending.

But the most salient point is that Congress isn't particularly interested in defense issues. This isn't a matter of ideology. Even before the Republican victory the Armed Services Committees were declining in prestige. Mainly because of the post–Cold War reduction in military budgets, defense is an unpleasant issue for members of Congress. Several rounds of base closings have made membership on the Armed Services Committees something of a liability: as one congressional staff member told me several years ago, "Back home, they'll ask, 'If you're on the committee, why couldn't you do something about it?'" Among the congressional freshmen elected to the House in 1992, nineteen requested seats on the Science and Technology Committee, historically a backwater, whereas only seven asked for Armed Services.

CHANGES IN THE SECURITY ENVIRONMENT

WITH the evaporation of the Soviet Union, many Americans don't understand why the nation needs a large standing army. For the first time in its history (with the possible exception of the two decades preceding the Spanish-American War) the U.S. Army must justify its existence to the American people. Again, this suggests that the Army will become more like the Marines—small, expeditionary, and, for the good of the institution, better at explaining itself to Congress and the media. Peacetime trends in American civilian-military relations already point toward huge budget cuts in the coming years. Last year, for example, Peter DeFazio, a Democratic congressman from Oregon, proposed reducing defense spending to $210 billion in 2001, from the current $263 billion. The Electronic Industries Association in 1995 forecast a 2005 defense budget of $214 billion. The Army is likely to suffer a disproportionate share of the cuts, and most of the cuts will be aimed at personnel rather than at procurement or operations and maintenance.

The junior officer corps, apart from its female and minority whelmingly hard-right Republican and largely comfortable wit

Also with the end of the Cold War, the military's definition of "the threat" went up for grabs. Everybody used to agree that it was the Soviet Union. Now there is a lot of talk in the military, especially in the Marines, that the new threat is chaos. Sergeant Darren Carey, a drill instructor for Platoon 3086, the unit I followed home from Parris Island, taught the platoon that "today the threat is the low-intensity things, the nine-one-one, that you never know what's going to happen—it's Bosnia, Haiti, Somalia." He told me that he also teaches that

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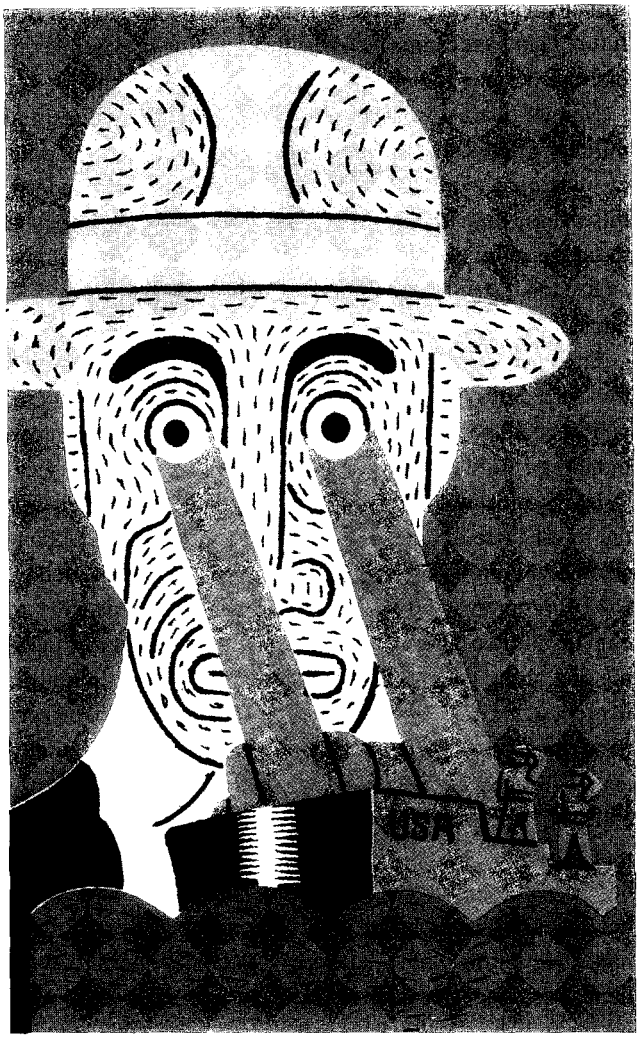

members, appears to be over-
the views of Rush Limbaugh.

the threat is "the decline of the family, the decline of morals."

As his comment indicates, it is easy to blur the line between foreign and domestic enemies. I think this haziness may already be occurring on an institutional scale with the Marines, for whom the Los Angeles riots of 1992 were a preamble to the Somalia deployment later that year. From a military perspective, the operations were similar: in both cases Marine combat units based in California were sent to intervene in fighting between armed urban factions. "As soon as we got to Mogadishu, we were struck by the similarity to L.A.," one Marine colonel involved in both operations told me.

Some of the lessons learned by the Marines in Los Angeles are worrisome, especially when seen in the context of a strongly conservative, politically active military. Marine Major Timothy Reeves argued in a paper written at the Marine Command and Staff College that because of "the rising potential for civil disobedience within the inner cities" it is "inevitable" that the U.S. military will be employed more often within American borders. The trouble, he said, is that a variety of U.S. laws inhibit the execution of domestic missions. In Los Angeles, Reeves said, when faced with a choice between violating doctrine and violating federal law some Marines chose the latter course, detaining suspects and conducting warrantless searches. Similarly, Marine Captain Guy Miner reported in a 1992 issue of the *Marine Corps Gazette* that Marine intelligence units were initially worried by the need to collect intelligence on U.S. citizens in ways that would violate a 1981 Executive Order, but that "this inhibition was quickly overcome as intelligence personnel sought any way possible to support the operation with which the regiment had been tasked."

Reeves called for major alterations of U.S. law to enable the Marines to execute these new domestic missions just as they execute missions abroad—changes that could carry long-term consequences for U.S. civilian-military relations. "Experience from the Los Angeles riots," he said in his paper, "demonstrated the need to grant U.S. Marine forces the legal right to detain vehicles and suspects, conduct arrests, searches, and seizures in order to accomplish the peacekeeping mission." (The Los Angeles mission also demonstrated a need for the Marines to coordinate terminology with the police: when police officers asked some Marines to cover them while they confronted an armed suspect barricaded in his residence, Reeves reported, the Marines shot approximately thirty rounds of what they call "covering fire" into the building before the police stopped them.)

In a December, 1994, article in the *Marine Corps Gazette*, William S. Lind, a military analyst who has been influential in the doctrinal thinking of the post–Cold War Marines, wrote with two Marine reservists that American culture is "collapsing."

> Starting in the mid-1960s, we have thrown away the values, morals, and standards that define traditional Western culture. In part, this has been driven by cultural radicals, people who hate our Judeo-Christian culture. Dominant in the elite, especially in the universities, the media, and the entertainment industry (now the most powerful force in our culture and a source of endless degradation), the cultural radicals have successfully pushed an agenda of moral relativism, militant secularism, and sexual and social "liberation." This agenda has slowly codified into a new ideology, usually known as "multiculturalism" or "political correctness," that is in essence Marxism translated from economic into social and cultural terms.

Little is remarkable about that paragraph, which reads like standard right-wing American rhetoric of the nineties—not all that different from Pat Robertson or Pat Buchanan. Its significance lies in the conclusion that Lind and his co-authors drew: "The next real war we fight is likely to be on American soil."

As a coda, retired Colonel Michael Wyly wrote a few months later in another *Gazette* article, "We must be willing

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to realize that our real enemy is as likely to appear within our own borders as without." He then took swipes at the two fundamental principles of U.S. military professionalism: unwavering subordination to civilian control and nonparticipation in politics. "If our laws and self-image of our role as military professionals do not allow for [the recognition that the real enemy may be within] we need to change them." Wyly raised the possibility that the Marines would refuse to enforce certain laws. Specifically, if Congress were to restrict gun ownership, then Marines would need to understand that "enforcing such a restriction could quickly make us the enemy of constitutional freedom." (To its credit, the *Gazette* carried in the same issue a commonsense response to the Lind article from Major Mark Bean, who wrote, "America is made of tougher stuff than the authors would have us believe.")

When the military is politically active, when it believes it is uniquely aware of certain dangers, when it discusses responding to domestic threats to cherished values, then it edges toward becoming an independent actor in domestic politics. "A classic example of this situation happened in Chile," Major Robert Newton warned at the conclusion of his report "The Politicization of the Officer Corps." "The Chilean military was a very professional organization. The majority of the officer corps came from the middle class. When the society elected a communist President, the military broke from society. The officer corps believed this change threatened the basic principles upon which the society rested."

WHAT MUST BE DONE?

A U.S. military coup remains extremely unlikely. Samuel Huntington seems closer to the mark when he attributes the civilian-military turbulence of the Clinton Administration to the process of seeking out a new post–Cold War equilibrium in the civilian-military relationship.

But not all equilibriums are equal. The United States may be in danger of drifting into a situation in which the military is neither well understood nor well used and yet—as was not true in previous eras of military estrangement—is big, politically active, and frequently employed on a large scale to execute American foreign policy. The development of the semi-autonomous military described by the Harvard political scientist Michael Desch isn't healthy in a democracy. In addition, it isn't clear that the U.S. military, for all its political-military expertise, is best placed to decide how it should be used, either at home or abroad. However ignorant of military affairs the Clinton Administration may be, its estimate of the human costs of invading Haiti appears to have been far more accurate than the Pentagon's. Similarly, sixteen months into the Bosnian deployment none of the military's grim warnings that the U.S. military would suffer widespread casualties as it became entangled in a guerrilla war had been realized. This is a testament in part to the professionalism of today's soldiers. But it should also suggest that future Pentagon estimates of the human costs of possible operations deserve to be viewed with great skepticism.

Mutual distrust between the nation's political elites and military leaders could ultimately undercut U.S. foreign policy, making it more difficult to use force effectively. Indeed, this unease may in part explain why the Army was reluctant to take a more activist stance in the Haiti and Bosnia missions, and instead fretted publicly about "mission creep." To begin to repair the relationship, several steps could be taken.

First, consideration should be given to reinstating some form of a draft. Along the lines of the current German system, youths could be given the choice of performing, say, eighteen months of military service or two years of public service.

But the resumption of conscription appears unlikely for the foreseeable future, so several other steps should be considered in order to engage the military with civilian society. ROTC programs should be vastly expanded, especially at elite institutions. The service requirement attached to attending one of the three military academies might be shortened, in order to encourage more military officers to pursue careers in civilian society. Among other things, this might eventually lead to the presence in Congress of more people with military experience. Whenever possible, military officers pursuing higher degrees should be sent to civilian universities, whether or not this means closing some military schools. As Eliot Cohen, a military strategist at Johns Hopkins who is one of the most thoughtful commentators on U.S. civilian-military relations, has suggested, there may even be ways of bringing people into the military later in their lives—possibly at ranks as high as lieutenant colonel. And the military could use the skills of reservists far more imaginatively, especially in an era when civilian technologies are outpacing military ones. To help recruiters draw from the other end of the socio-economic scale, retired Admiral Stanley Arthur suggests that the military establish special preparatory programs that would enable more inner-city youths to enlist.

But the most important change that should be made involves the military only secondarily. This concerns the isolation of professional Americans, or the upper middle class, from the broad concerns of society. Ignorance of the military is, I think, just one manifestation of that larger problem. We live in an era when a Democratic President sends his child to private school and few eyebrows are raised. America's military problem is not unlike that facing parts of the former Soviet Union. In reviewing the depredations of semi-autonomous or fully autonomous militias in thirty-one new states and "ministates" in the old Eastern bloc and the former Yugoslavia, Charles H. Fairbanks Jr., an expert on post-Communist transitions, recommended that in order to assert public control over those forces, "it is particularly important to involve the new middle class . . . in military service." America would do well to take the same advice.

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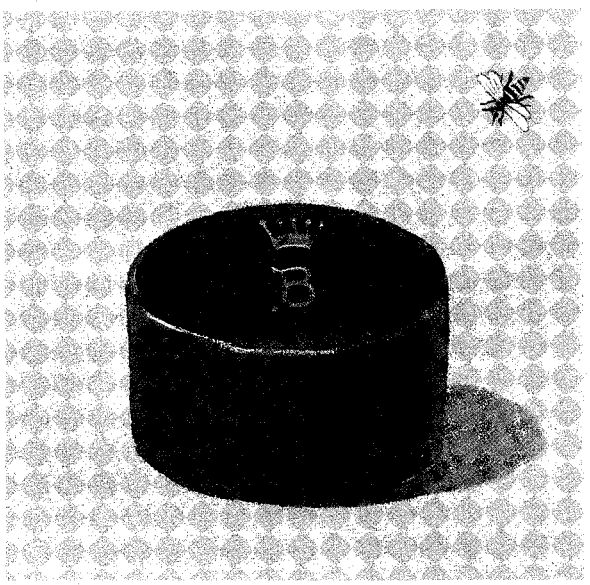
The Poetry Baron

by TESS GALLAGHER



HE SIGNED ALL mandates "The Poetry Baron." Or, if he wanted particularly to sweeten his way with Mary Beth—the department secretary, who had been there since the first brick was laid at this small Pennsylvania college—he would obsequiously pen, "The Little Baron" or "The Baronette."

He used a red ink pad and a Chinese seal with a character on it that he later discovered meant something like "Two Dead Oars." But if anyone asked, he told them it meant "Long Life and Happiness." What was important was having a civilization behind him as old as the Chinese.

▪

IN HIS POETRY workshops the Baron liked to maintain the feel of a democratic organism reaching consensus, much as amoebic entities in distant committee rooms arrive at terms such as "the mentally challenged," "the temporarily abled," and "the legally pernicious." The Baron often applied the last term to a new and rising class of welfare recipients who profitably allied themselves with lawyers to form practically unbeatable teams. They had nothing to lose but time. When their purpose was to force settlements with organizations as diverse as Safeway, the NRA, and Planned Parenthood, or with well-heeled relatives of those on welfare, these teams were wickedly effective.

He knew a lot about welfare mothers, because the eldest of his two daughters had been one for twenty-odd years, with the exception of a three-month hiatus when she'd opened a little hot-dog stand down at the ferry dock. All her letters began "Dear Dad, I could sure use some money to buy . . ." and ended "Remember, Dad, there are steps I can take if you can't find it in your heart to help me."

When the Baron gazed at the cherubic faces of his female students, he often thought tenderly of his elder daughter at eighteen, already pregnant with the child of a car thief.

One aspiring young poet, Betina Kibs, particularly appealed to him. She drew a black outline around her lips before painting them a scalding red, so her lips seemed to lift from her face and float toward him. All her poems were

The Baron read his mail. Again he had not received a Guggenheim. This was the fourteenth year he had applied. He was certain he had enemies

Illustrations by Sandra Hendler

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about getting dumped by her boyfriends, a succession of Cro-Magnons who debased and dismantled the empire of this defenseless tangle of black hair, blonde lashes, golden nose rings, and chartreuse fingernails.

▪

THE BARON ALWAYS spoke last, after his students had sufficiently mauled the poem under discussion. Once they had shaken out its entrails and begun to feign affection for certain turns of phrase, a "good image," or a "muscular verb action," he would frame his response with such circumspect benevolence that they were generally shamed into submission. If anyone began to jump rope with the entrails, he would intercede, uttering something that on the surface was neutral but carried sufficient admonitory undertow to bring the little cretins to a standstill. Something like "You cannot prick with straw—nor pierce with scimitar." They could mull that.

▪

IN AN EFFORT TO correct what he considered an egregious and continuing neglect of female art, despite critical pretenses to the contrary, he would quote only women poets; yet he scorned as "ghettoizers" anthologies that isolated the sex. In order to demonstrate graphically the inequality of the canon, he commanded his students to rip from their assigned anthology all poems not by women. The bindings were so debilitated as a result that he passed out yarn and darning needles for the students to sew the few remaining pages together again.

Pages and pages, entire sheaves of male poetry, wafted in the breeze created by their excited frenzy of tearing and yanking. Next the Baron suggested that the young poets pretend they were Russians living in the time of Anna Akhmatova, under Stalin. They could turn off the heat in their student garrets, sit around in their greatcoats drinking watered-down tea, and memorize the work of the male poets they were about to discard: the easy poets like Walt Whitman and Robinson Jeffers, or Wallace Stevens—say, perhaps his "The Idea of Order at Key West." *They*, the Baron's beloved outposts of the future, would be the repositories, the last living, breathing archives, of these about-to-be-transmogrified verbal megalomaniacs.

▪

THE STUDENTS WERE thrilled with the stringency of this assignment. They were all women except for one blond, chunky student named Alfred Greenhill, who wore mulberry-colored socks and printed all his poems in block letters on cream-colored vellum paper that his father supplied from England. Greenhill's father was an English novelist who went through paper the way elephants crush forests in Africa. Excesses of this sort caused strange linkages in the Baron's mind—Napoleon's memoirs, for example, scribbled onto the faces of playing cards, for lack of paper on Saint Helena.

▪

THE BARON'S ATTENTION focused often on Greenhill. Why was he always smiling? What drug was he taking to get that impermeable, glazed-over look? The Baron felt an inexplicable strain of cruelty in his veins when he read Greenhill's poems. They reminded him of himself at the same age—stinking with "mossy fronds," able oracularly to "gaze across continents," displaying an Audenesque penchant for admonishing "the odious public." Napoleon would gladly have squandered this overinflated Bambi with Marshal Ney's Third Corps, blasted by musket fire, cut to pieces by Russian cannonballs.

The Baron thought that history, like literature, provided an integrative stimulus to daily life. Both history and literature, he believed, were capable of spontaneously regenerating the collective memory as an evolving organism. Napoleon, consequently, was never far from his thoughts.

▪

THE POETRY BARON, a recovering alcoholic, drank only cranberry juice. Occasionally he energized it with a jolt of seltzer. But only occasionally. If asked how he had managed his miraculous recovery, he would have lowered his voice to its most humble register and intoned, "Grace." But nobody asked. As a recovering drunk, he was as unspectacularly sober as he'd been spectacular when to breathe was to drink.

▪

MARY BETH LEFT him a nonfat carob cupcake in his mailbox. On it, in gold, was a capital *B* with a little crown over it. She *did* understand.

▪

HE LISTENED TO his students recite passages by the male poets they had memorized from the disassembled anthology. After each recitation he would ask if any lines or images had stuck in their minds. They were to write those down. Then the Baron would say, "Memory *is* imagination. Simply forget all *except* those shreds and tatters. After all, that's what poetry must be—memorable. If it isn't, well, then, it's just a load of turkey whack."

The students stared at him in wide-eyed adulation. "The significant is always incorporated into the present. If it's important, it will reassert itself. Now, go back to your garrets and burn those torn-out pages. Make a hefty little bonfire and warm your sweet tushes over it." He was sure, he added, that something deep and enduring about the nature of art through time would occur to them as a result. He silently reflected on an image from an account in which Napoleon, disguised as a Monsieur de Rayneval, lifted his coattails above his famous white breeches to warm his bum before a spitting greenwood fire in Warsaw.

▪

ANOTHER LETTER had arrived from his welfare daughter, Trina. He thought it had the sweet-sour, ready-to-poison-your-picnic smell of rancid mayonnaise. Over the years she

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had engendered four children, each by a different man. The car thief appeared intermittently to "sponge off her," as she put it, and to baby-sit the two youngest, who were still at home but verging on becoming teenagers. The three other men came into focus from time to time.

Her "nest" would soon be empty, she wrote. She had recently conceived the idea that she might adopt a Chinese baby girl, since children seemed to be her thing. Would he, her one and only, next-to-God father, consider signing papers declaring that she had an inheritance coming? He might mention the bad hearts of his prematurely deceased father and grandfather. (Here the Baron paused and placed his right hand on his chest, as if to recite the Pledge of Allegiance.) Could he, in addition, verify that he intended to leave her substantial royalties from his fifteen books of poetry? (How, he wondered, should he break it to her that all but two of the books were out of print and that even these had netted a paltry $800?)

Her letter continued: Could he possibly have his various publishers run spreadsheets of earnings for the past twenty years, so that future earnings could be projected? (Spreadsheets indeed!) And would he mind her charging her round-trip plane ticket to Beijing on his credit card? The baby, she was glad to say, would travel free. While Trina was in China ransacking orphanages for just the right baby, his ex-wife would be looking after two of Trina's "four little lambs," as his daughter persisted in referring to her collective offspring.

The Baron hated the way "four" rhymed in his head with "poor." He stopped himself there.

▪

BETINA KIBS WAS waiting outside the Baron's office when he arrived. She had baked a batch of chocolate-chip cookies and handed over a dozen, tied in her muffler. The Baron was touched. He recalled Napoleon's Polish mistress, Maria Walewska, described as "beautiful but brainless." Betina put her to shame; she was beautiful in a ruined sort of way, which was the fashion. He felt drawn to her stylistic savvy, her way of affecting the engagingly repellent veneer of a future ripe before its time.

He unlocked his office door, invited the young woman inside to a chair near his desk, and unwrapped the cookies. They were fuzzed with blue nubs of wool. He picked out one that was unaffected and began to munch. Betina suddenly started to sob uncontrollably. The Baron felt very concerned and protective, yet he knew it would be a mistake to leap up from his desk and throw his arms around her, as he had been wont to do with female students in his drunken pre-Baron days. He simply bowed his head and began to recite from Dorothy Wordsworth:

> "And when the storm comes from the North
> It lingers near that pastoral spot,
> And piping through the mossy walls,
> It seems delighted with its lot."

Betina appeared to take heart from the incantational rhythms of his recitation. Whatever had been oppressing her dissipated as suddenly as it had descended. The Baron ate another cookie. It was partly crumbled, as if she had carried it on a long and circuitous journey by horseback. Betina began exuberantly to recount Charlotte Brontë's portrayal of merry days at Thornfield Hall. She volunteered that she'd been "devouring Brontë" for another class.

The Baron was pleased. He had performed a kindly act. He had demonstrated the healing properties of literature. He had also eaten chocolate-chip cookies and managed to keep his hands to himself. After showing Ms. Kibs out he opened his desk drawer and took a refreshing swig of cranberry juice. Ah, but where was his Caulaincourt to make him swerve off this sweet detour? Order through fluctuation, he reasoned, had carried him through many unsung campaigns. Why stop now?

▪

"GREENHILL!" THE BARON said, jerking to attention the despondent and melancholy souls of the entire roomful of young female poets. "What's the meaning of this drivel?!"

▪

THE BARON DISLIKED committees. When he did serve, he opted for high visibility but little real responsibility, and he insisted on being chair. He'd recently consented to head a committee to design a memorial garden, the money to be donated by a bereft family whose son had thrown himself out a tenth-story window after being rejected by his first love.

The Baron generally fought all things nostalgic, but he conceived the idea of a modest waterfall and defended the proposal as if his divine majority must prevail. After the third meeting he telephoned one recalcitrant committee member to reiterate the necessity of meditational alcoves in contemporary life. How else could the young be expected to accomplish that most important transfer of energy between the dead and the living? Between the so-called real and the possible? When his colleague disagreed with him about the waterfall, the Baron slammed down the phone. Anger management indeed! Blast the miserable curs with all you've got. Then scrape the dead away from the gates and enter!

▪

ONE EVENING his students could barely conceal their wry smiles as he entered the seminar room. (All his classes were held after dark, because he believed that poetry survived best when inferior forms of light, those lacking modulation and artifice, were at a minimum. He would have conducted class by candlelight had fire codes permitted.) The students continued to titter until he demanded to know what so amused them.

"Your mouth," Greenhill volunteered. "There's a lavender rim around your lips. Like you've been drinking wine."

The Baron raised himself slowly from his comfortable

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chair at the head of the long table and began to pace the room in silence, with great, empire-crushing strides. Finally, when he knew the hearts in their young poet breasts must be quaking, he stared at them as the Russian Field Marshal Kutuzov had stared down the French near the Nara River. "Cranberry juice," he said. Then he strode toward the forest.

▪

THE BARON READ his mail. Again he had not received a Guggenheim. He dropped the puny pamphlet naming winners to the floor and stomped on it. This was the fourteenth year he had applied. Perhaps his courier had been waylaid. He was certain he had enemies. He felt like the beast slouching toward coal-besmutted Glasgow when he considered the ill will these traitors against posterity contemptuously bore him. He might have shaken off his fury in his usual meditational stroll at dusk along the Erie Canal, but it was mid-afternoon. He did a few vehement turns around his rose garden, trying to calm himself. He thought of migrating to Oregon, and took pleasure imagining the missives of entreaty from students and colleagues that would clog his departmental mailbox. Oregon. Hiking and blueberries. Perhaps he could set up shop adjoining a casino run by Native Americans along the Columbia. He would subsist on grants to pen epic verse on the multicultural aspects of casino life.

Gradually the roses, their silence, tamed his adventurous spirit. He sang a few verses of an Irish air about Napoleon trouncing the English. The refrain cheered him: *"The bonny bunch of roses, oh!"*

At last benevolence was restored. He resolved to turn his resentment into nobility of spirit. He would write a pantoum using the names of all the poets who had ever won Guggenheims.

DRAGONFLY

Book says "most predacious." Book
says "fastest
    flying insect," says it eats
its body weight in half an hour.
Mother called it
                the devil's
darning needle. Book adds "darner"
and "devil's arrow." Mother said
it would stitch shut the eyes,
                ears, lips,
of sleeping children, and Book confirms
that mothers would say that.
                Book says
dragonflies can
                snap a gnat
in mid-
        air, eat it on the wing,
and Book says that what I've always called
a dragonfly is really, with its
long,
            slender body, a
                damselfly
which strafes the pond clot, soars,
swoops,
                hovers, sideslips, loops,
                and twists,
sunlight revealing a new glint
of iridescent
                shimmer—purple, red,
green, turquoise, gold, gunmetal blue—
with every pass.
                It's hunting: a whip
tip
                cracking gnats out of the air
so quick I can't see it happen
and wouldn't know except I trust
Book, Book,
                the goddamn book, because
I cannot see the hunting. See
what looks like pleasure
                (loop
                and soar),
but isn't. Book insists on purpose.
Not even blood sport. Work. But its purpose
is not my purpose: pleasure
                (dive, jink, roll,
then stillness at great speed)
                beside black water.

—ANDREW HUDGINS

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▪

HE STUDIED HIMSELF in the mirror. A cranberry stain had inked itself imperfectly onto his upper lip, with a break at the apex. He thought he looked faintly Chinese, as in Charlie Chan sans spats. He rubbed the stain with Irish Spring soap, but it would not come off. Like a workman, he now kept a thermos of cranberry juice with him at all times, even in the classroom. He learned to drink from it in such a way that a roseate circle formed around his lips.

The students had come to consider his mouth ring an eccentricity, though some of the more devout claimed that it was, like the stigmata, a sign of divine inclusion. At the end of a seminar on free verse he passed out packets of cherry Kool-Aid. "To love people for their strengths is easy," he said. "But to love them for their weaknesses—now there rests true enlightenment. Human wisdom—*that* is the secret of poetry." A very silly look passed across Greenhill's face. No doubt he had spent the night roasting horseflesh on his saber point at some bivouac fire in the interminable falling snow. The tip of his nose was red.

▪

TRINA HAD WRITTEN to say that she had the Chinese baby girl at her bosom. "Thanks, Dad, for helping me save her from that terrible rathole of an orphanage. I know she's in good health, because they don't even make it to the orphanages if they're in bad health. They die, some at the hands of their own parents, and are buried in some godforsaken unmarked place." The Baron considered Napoleon's vacant tomb on Saint Helena, shorn not only of its occupant but also of the cherished willows from which the soldiers stripped souvenir branches on the day of his burial. He felt like a stripped willow himself.

The rest of Trina's letter went on to explain that despite his recent generosity, neither of her younger "lambs" had winter coats, not to mention that the bristles on their toothbrushes were worn to the nubs. They were down to biscuits and porridge. Her son and daughter out on their own weren't making it either. She could use some cash. If he didn't "pony up," she would be sure to point out to her lawyer friend that it was *his* idea for her to adopt the Chinese girl, inflicting guilt and further financial burdens on her. In any dispute it would be his word against hers. All his correspondence would instantly become legal documentation, simply by virtue of her accusation. If he had anything he wanted to hide, well, it would just be too bad. He would be one dead poet.

The Baron refolded the letter and wrote "Ode to House Dust."

▪

HE HAD BEGUN to obsess about Betina. He thought he could smell chocolate-chip cookies everywhere. He hoped fervently to find her positioned outside his office door. Instead the air seemed permeated by the giddy odor of horseflesh, no doubt roasted to feed the starving rabble. He stepped over bodies like cordwood, just to enter his humble retreat.

▪

ONE OF THE more acerbic female students reported having singed the plastic shower curtain in her apartment while burning the pages of white-male poetry in her bathtub. The plastic stench had alarmed other tenants. The fire department had been called. She was about to be evicted. Did anyone need a roommate?

The Baron remarked that the price of great art was that the artist be misapprehended, publicly disparaged, and ultimately exiled. Greenhill invited the homeless student into exile with him and five male students who were majoring in engineering.

▪

THE BARON TOOK a long solitary walk by the Erie Canal at dusk. The pale oval face of Betina was seldom out of his mind now. His current wife thought his distracted air meant that he was generating a new epic poem. He was. The heroine was mature and blonde, to throw his wife off the scent. The outlines of limestone mountains appeared at intervals in misty passages, as on ancient Chinese scrolls. The poem would bear the enigmatic dedication "To My Beloved."

▪

MARY BETH LEFT a memo in his box. The committee for the memorial garden had been peremptorily dissolved. The parents of the dead student had withdrawn funding. The Baron mused sadly on the unrecorded demise of a waterfall. He made a note in his notebook. Later that day a snapshot of a double waterfall, labeled simply "Burney Falls," mysteriously appeared in his mailbox.

▪

AS IN A CHEKHOV story, the Baron's eyes grew oily and rapacious when he looked at Betina. Finally he seized a moment after class one night while escorting her to a rendezvous with yet another of her "dolty" boyfriends. He asked to have lunch so that he could suggest strategies for getting her out of a rut regarding her subject matter. She accepted. The Baron went back to his office and, as if to raise a triumphal hunting horn or to sound an advance, lifted his thermos of cranberry juice to his lips.

▪

"GREENHILL!" THE BARON roared. "You wouldn't know slant rhyme from a banana peel if you slipped on one!"

▪

TRINA WROTE TO say that her lawyer friend had informed her about something called renewal rights. According to federal law, his "works" written prior to 1978 belonged partly to her. Apparently, she wrote, a fourth, or maybe as much as a third, of any proceeds from anthology and reprint rights, etc., should be coming to her. She would naturally keep this under her bonnet, since if her younger sister were to find out, she could conceivably claim a share. Trina wrote that his "legacy" was very important to her and to her lambs. She was glad the government was making sure

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she "participated" in his legacy, whether or not he intended it. This law, she pointed out, would countermand anything he might write into his will to exclude her. She was especially happy that she would benefit from his legacy both after his death and now, while she was still young enough to enjoy spending the proceeds.

The Baron made a note to seek advice from his own lawyer friend.

▪

THE POETRY BARON sent his students out over the weekend to feed the hungry at an inner-city soup kitchen. They needed to learn social responsibility. It should seep into their poems osmotically, he told them, not simply be barnacled on as an afterthought. Many of them, unlike the Chinese, had never had to share a meal dipped from the communal pot. How would they have stood up to an evening in retreat with Marshal Victor at twenty-seven degrees below zero? "Frozen birds, frozen horseflesh, frozen tears."

▪

HIS LAWYER FRIEND had gone to Florida for an extended holiday. The Baron was left in the dark about renewal rights, although a voice on the telephone at the Writers' Defense League told him that they could apply only *after* his death. He wrote Trina this with some trepidation. He confessed that he didn't have the time or the "psychic surplus" to get into a dispute with her. He had to beat out a lot of recently retired poets who could now write full time and were, therefore, a serious threat to his hopes for a Pulitzer. Encumbered as he was with the crippled syntax of post-adolescent, hormone-driven poetry aspirants, not to mention his potentially bad heart, he was lucky to crank out an occasional chapbook. He wondered desperately whether she would sell him her supposed rights to a fourth of his literary empire. If so, what would she take?

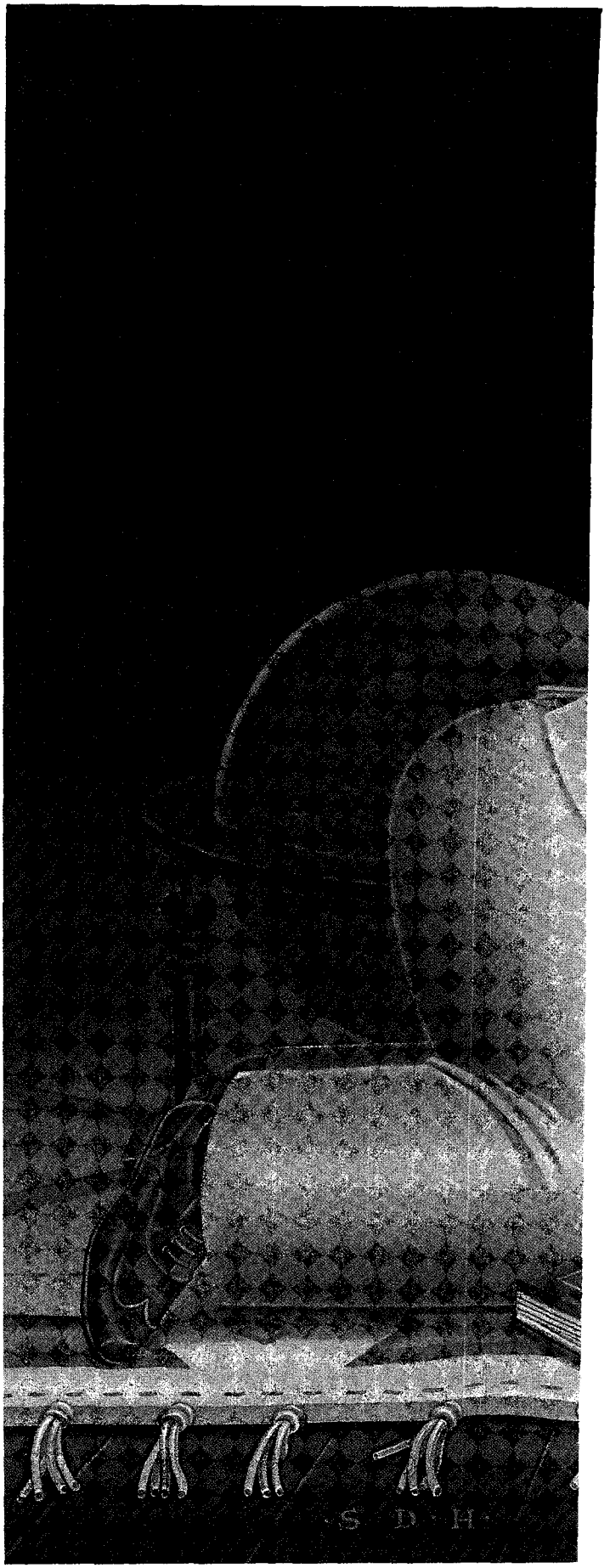
▪

THE BARON FELT beleaguered, persecuted, invaded by malignant and remorseless spirits. Yet as he surveyed his motley troops, he felt oddly companioned. A courier, looking much like Greenhill, his feet bound with woolen mufflers, approached to present the news: 32,765 cadavers of horses burning on the fields of Borodino. He had counted every one, so great was his disbelief. This apparition was followed swiftly by a late image of Napoleon astride the little horse named Hope, trotting gallantly along the goat paths of Saint Helena. The Emperor had just arrived on the island, and rescue still loomed falsely.

"The soul has bandaged moments," the Baron mused mysteriously to his students.

▪

HE DROVE BETINA to the airport restaurant for lunch. It was attached to a mostly vacant but, he'd been assured, comfortable hotel. They sat in a booth overlooking a vast flat tract of industrial properties bounded by high chain-link



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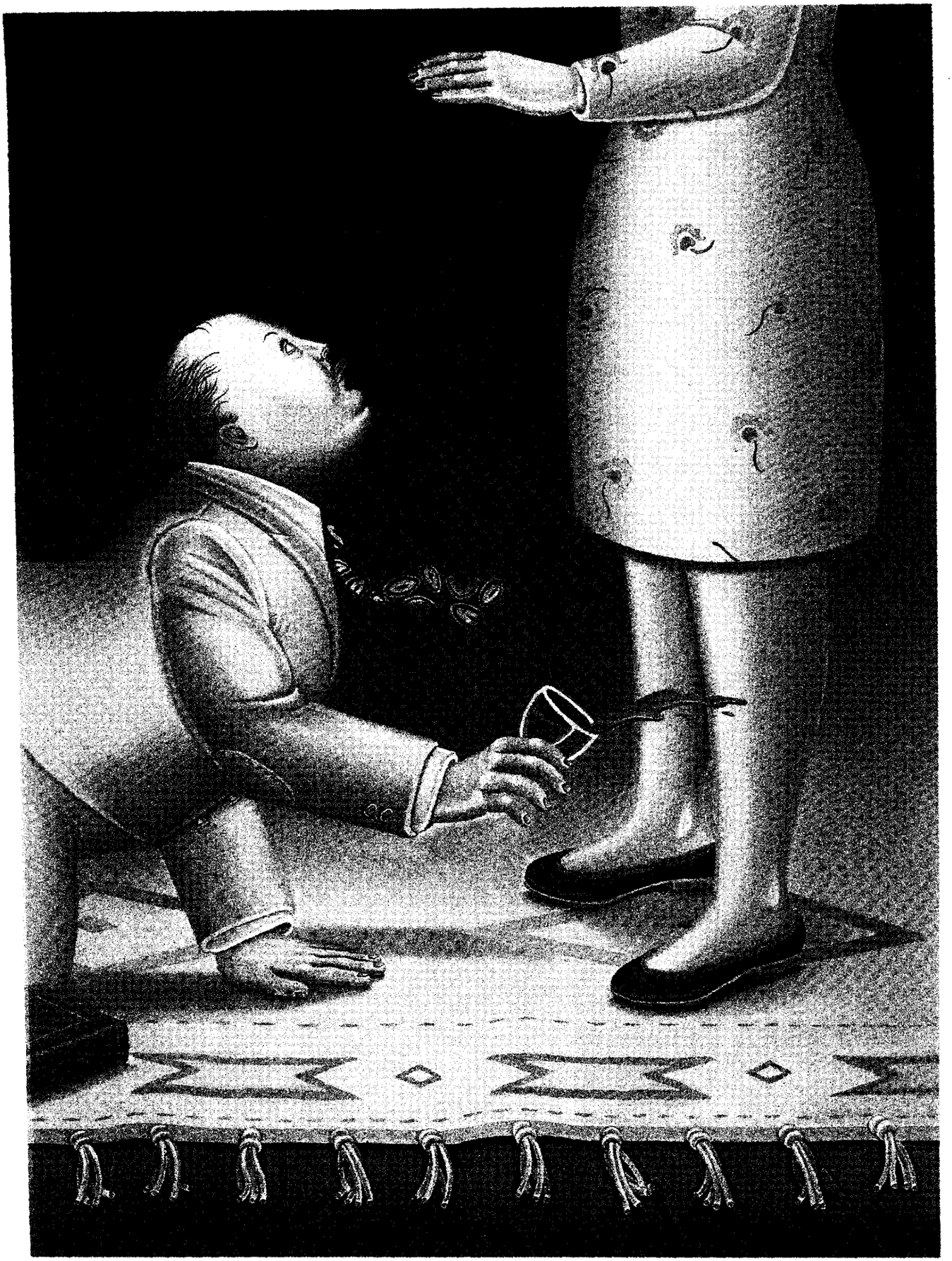

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fencing. They regarded this succession of windowless warehouses, the contents of which would remain an eternal secret, as others might have surveyed the holdings of a great and prosperous estate. They dined sumptuously but quickly. Then he led her down the carpeted corridor off the restaurant to Room 111 and turned the key. *He knew no haste*, he thought, as he arranged her on the flowered coverlet. *Slowly, slowly up Mount Fujiyama.*

▪

"GREENHILL!" THE BARON thundered. "Will you ever stop writing like some third sex to some fourth sex and just get down to it, son!"—for he'd felt very tender of late toward his only male student, no matter that he still grinned like an altitude-starved initiate of the Furies. He took Greenhill aside after class and slipped him a box of ribbed, gold-colored condoms. "Greenhill, get out there and tumble."

▪

BETINA'S POEMS had begun to devise configurations in which her female voices bested their arrogant male persecutors. She wrote mythically and powerfully. A disquieting but compliant hero appeared whose aroma was of "cypress and coffee," and who, "like a spoiled horse, fresh from the stable," kept carrying her *to bed. To bed.*

▪

THE BARON WOULD likely have reigned on happily forever had it not been for Greenhill's spiking his cranberry juice at a student-faculty party. The Baron became a wild man. Imitating the dog in Ferlinghetti's poem that trotted "freely thru the street," he got down on all fours and sloshed cranberry juice obscenely onto the ankles of the very colleague who had put down his waterfall. Burney Falls indeed! He then stood on the hostess's sofa and recited the penultimate lines of Anne Sexton's "Consorting With Angels" in a strident, apocalyptic voice:

> "I'm all one skin like a fish.
> I'm no more a woman
> than Christ was a man."

Next, as if to exalt by example, the Baron began to strip off his clothes before the horrified gathering. Only Betina, rushing forward with her raincoat, saved him from complete and utter ruin at the hands of the ungrateful mob.

"Greenhill!" he shouted, lunging unsuccessfully for the boy. "Become a medical doctor. Consult livers and spleens. Go into sanitation. Catalogue rare fungi in the rain forest. But leave poetry, for God's sake, to the passionate and inspired, you lusterless bog of inertia!" In this last plea he heard his own voice rebound like a runaway droshky, heading straight for him.

With that the Baron passed out and had to be carried from the house, an immense personage borne away on the shoulders of his obscure and unworthy subjects.

▪

THE NEXT MORNING his wife's tearstained face seemed inordinately magnified by his feeling of having been bodily occupied by unholy forces that had squandered him in some cruel and futile campaign. Lifting his eyelids was painful. He smelled as if he'd been rubbed head to foot in eau de cologne of whiskey. And what of his legacy? What of his one and only voice among the many?

Just like the French not to bury their dead until the stench compelled them. But here he was, aboveground and seemingly alive. True, his standard had been trampled. The Queen of Beauty had retreated through a sea of slippery mud in her closed carriage. Now a turbaned emir in the form of his dear wife approached his bedside with what he took for a sign of treaty—or was it *entreaty*?

"Whose raincoat is this?" he heard the Baroness inquire. The Great Amnesiac raised himself painfully to his elbow and stared at the strange, limp artifact. Could this be the dark-blue cloak of Marengo, still damp with sprinkles of holy water? Staring at it, he reflected that it was eminently unfair that the already bloodied horses of the Polish lancers would yet again have to swim through "knife-edged slabs of ice" to save Napoleon's bacon. And poor Empress Marie-Louise—the affront of Maria Walewska's blue-eyed child sired by the Emperor. It was beyond disheartening. Life and history were, he conceded, fraught with intimate betrayals, despotic interludes, impoverished duchies, evacuations by night, twinkling stars over the fugitives, and someone advancing, shouting, "The Cossacks! The Cossacks!"

The Baron reached out and touched the hem of the raincoat. His fingertips tingled with the current of his unremembered actions from the night before. Indeed, an entire tracery of misused power and conscienceless defilement coursed through his being. The snowy escarpment of a singular remorse enfolded him. In his heart's eye he saw a few lonely campfires lit at the foot of a hill. Or had the torch been put to the imperial carriages? He thought he could smell the Emperor's table linen burning. No matter—he would call for his sheepskin and go forth on foot to dismantle the shabby impostors who had been wreaking such havoc in his kingdom. When he returned, he would see to it that the horse named King George would henceforth be called Sheikh. He must, if he survived, interrogate the pastry cook about how to make the oranges sweeter.

The Baron hoped that should anything befall him, the little hair he had left would be sufficient to provide ringlets for his beloved family members. His students would be glad for any remaining snippets. Faintly, at the back of his cranium, he could hear the relic seekers at Longwood ripping the Chinese wallpaper away like the frenzied rats who'd enlivened the floorboards under the Emperor's dinner table.

He turned at the door and embraced the Baroness as if he might never see her again, for he did love her dearly. And at that moment, as he would later distantly recount, big tears began to fall from his eyes.

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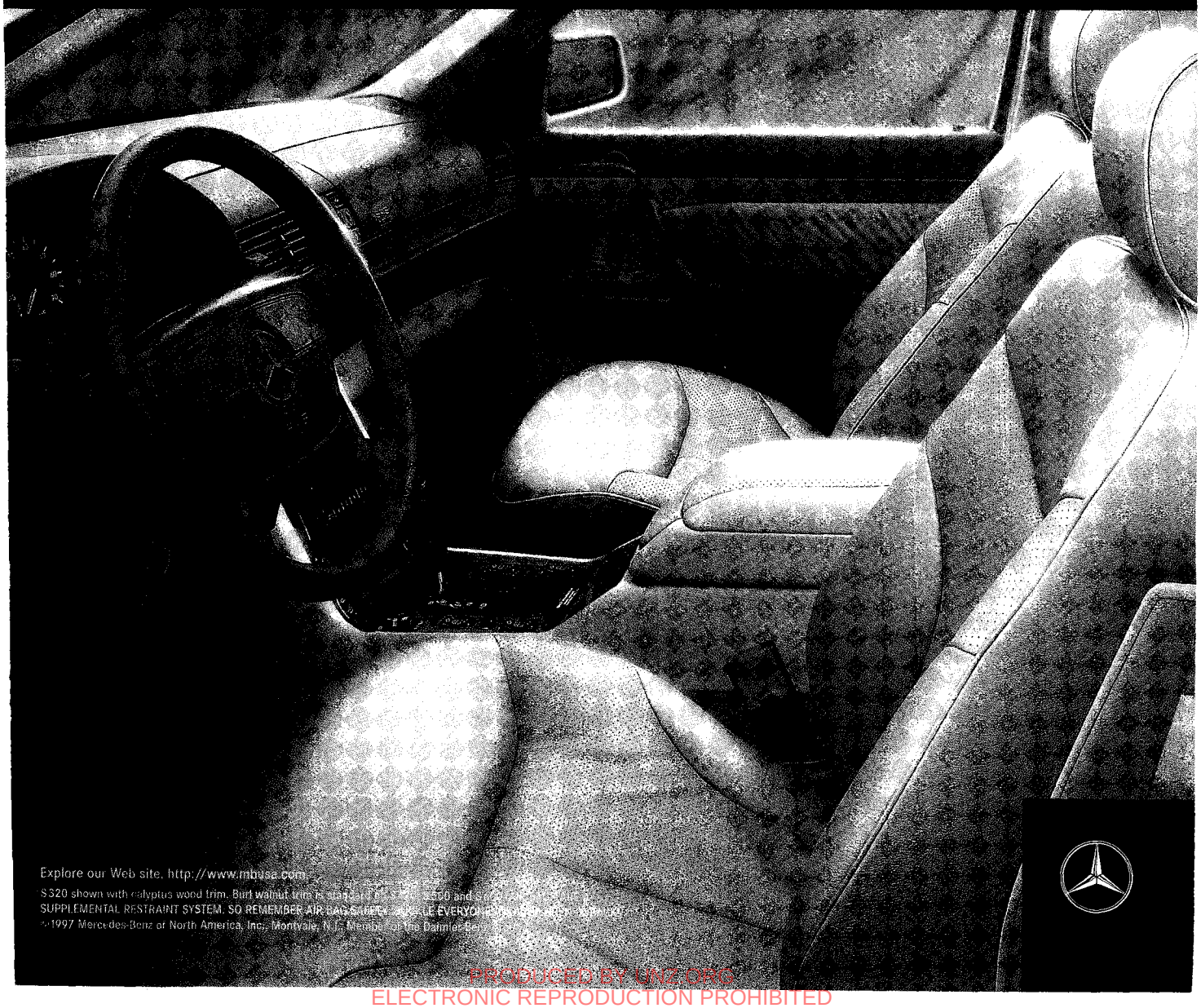

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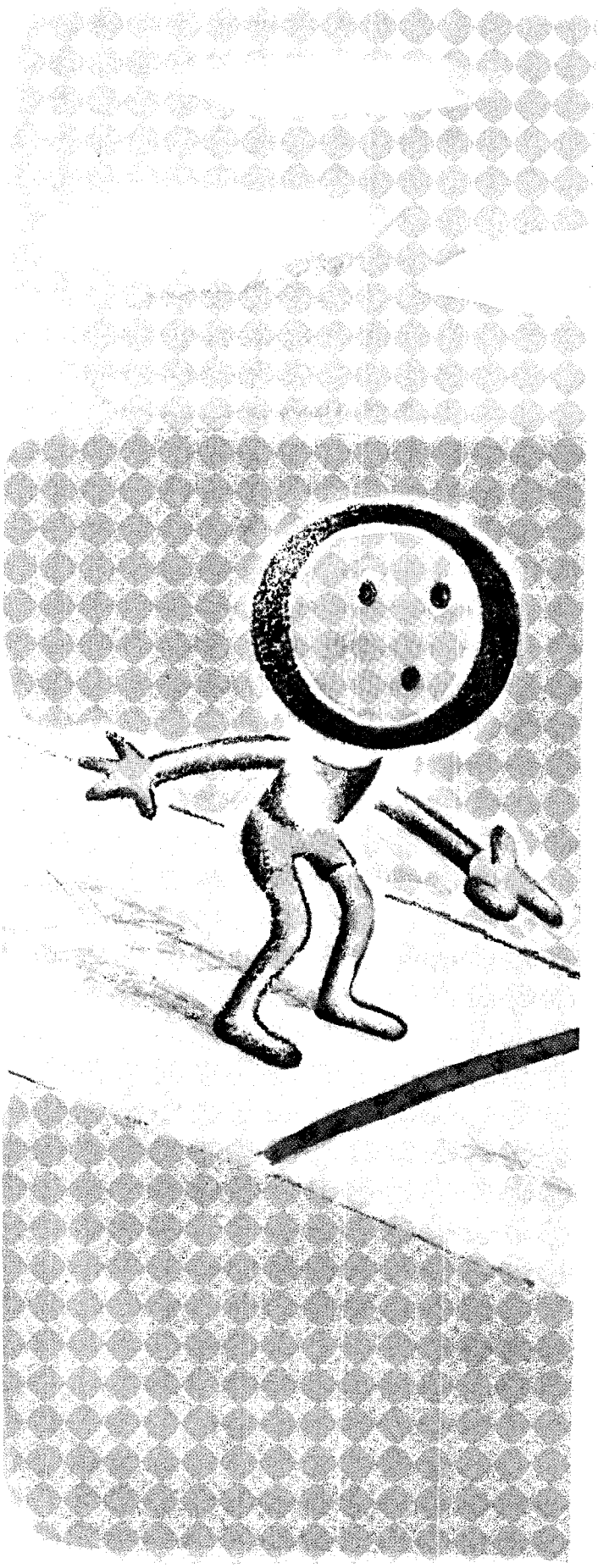
ZERO

by DICK TERESI

The debate over when the new millennium begins is by now a familiar one, and involves, as everyone knows, a missing year. But why was the year missing in the first place? The answer has to do with the belated invention of an essential number



WHEN does the new millennium begin—in 2000 or 2001? The public has voted with its checkbooks for the former. The Fairmont Hotel in San Francisco has fielded numerous calls to reserve rooms for the evening of December 31, 1999—and precious few for December 31, 2000. The story is the same at the Palmer House in Chicago, and at the Plaza in New York City.

Travel bookings are brisk for the tail end of 1999. Favorite destinations include the pyramids at Giza; the Taj Mahal, in India; Tanzania's Ngorongoro Crater; and Machu Picchu, in Peru. Civic leaders in Nazareth are building 2,000 new hotel rooms in anticipation of the crush. Islands located a hair west of the International Date Line are vying for the honor of being the first to usher in the millennium—and for the tourist dollars that accompany it—even though it will be hurricane season. A marketing representative for the island nation of Tonga offers the following scenario: "I'd like you to imagine thousands of schoolchildren lining the shoreline, perhaps spaced no more than two meters apart, all simul-

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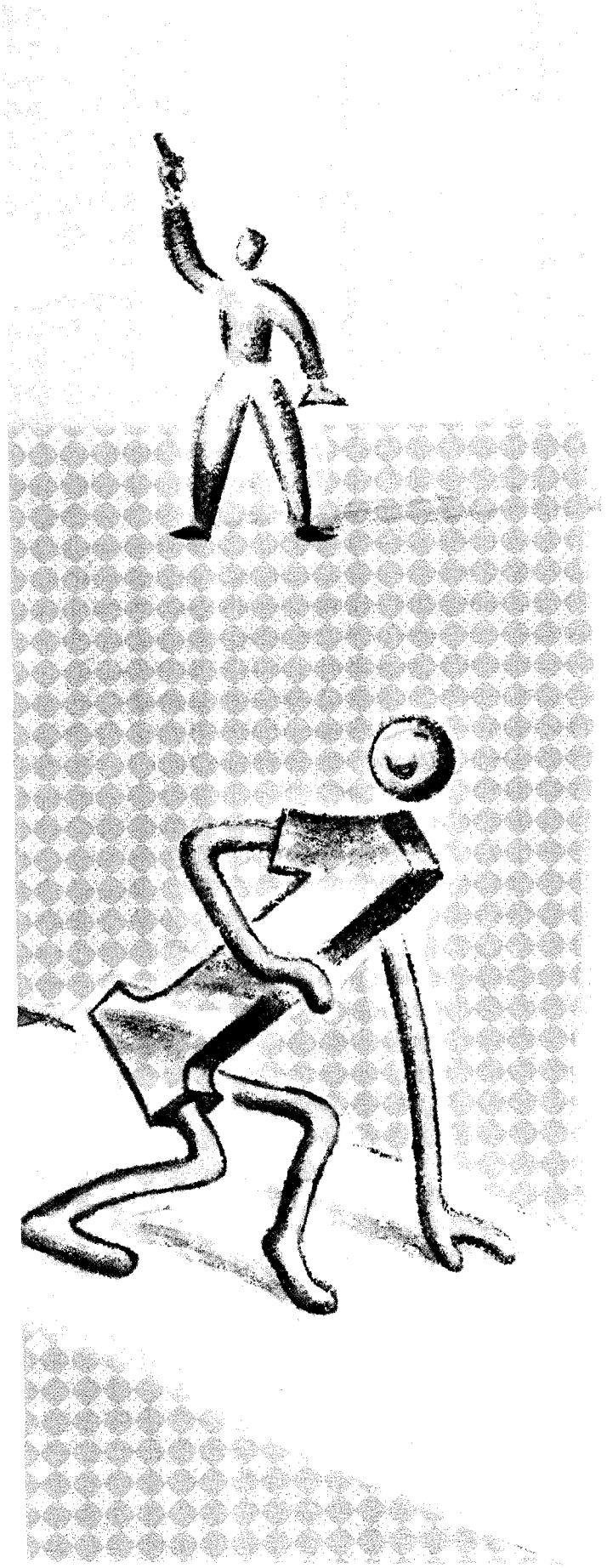

taneously lighting their coconut-sheath torches on the stroke of midnight."

And yet the idea that centuries begin in years ending in 01—not 00—has been the consensus of historians, newspaper editors, calendarists, bureaucrats, and other arbiters of the culture for at least three centuries.

Their opinion is not dispassionately held. *The Times* of London wrote on December 26, 1799, "The present century will not terminate till January 1, 1801. . . . We shall not pursue this question further. . . . It is a silly, childish discussion, and only exposes the want of brains of those who maintain a contrary opinion to that we have stated." Those afflicted with a "want of brains" included Goethe, Schiller, and Victor Hugo, all of whom made the error of coming to the defense of 1800 as the beginning of the nineteenth century, and were summarily censured by the press. *The New York Times, The Washington Post, Scientific American*, and *The Nation* put their editorial might behind 1901 as the first year of the twentieth century. *The New York Times* has endorsed 2001 for the twenty-first. I have not found a publication that has broken ranks, though *Science News* went astray briefly in 1986 when it stated in an obituary that Admiral Hyman Rickover, whose birth date was January 27, 1900, had been born in the first year of the century. The magazine quickly ran a letter to the editor pointing out its mistake.

The United States has no official calendar, and no legally prescribed method for numbering years. In general, though, we use the Gregorian calendar, established by an act of Parliament in 1751 as the official calendar of England. This act also bound the American colonies to the Gregorian, but that obligation was canceled by the Revolutionary War. In the United States we have the inalienable right to number our days and years as we please. One could run a company, for example, according to the Mayan 584-day Venerean calendar (based on Venus years) without fear of prosecution, though not without practical difficulties. Or one could choose from among the forty or so extant calendars worldwide.

Despite this calendrical freedom at least two federal agencies, for reasons best known to themselves, have taken a stand on the beginning of the next millennium. Both the National Institute of Standards and Technology (formerly the Bureau of Standards) and the Library of Congress have declared 2001 to be the first year of the twenty-first century. Ruth S. Freitag, of the library's science and technology division, has compiled a 232-source bibliography on the topic, some of the sources dating back to the close of the seventeenth century. Virtually all the sources support the library's choice of 2001. The Royal Greenwich Observatory, in England, the internationally recognized authority on timekeeping and the self-proclaimed last word on calendrics, posits January 1, 2001, as the start of the new era. (Timekeeping is defined as the "measurement of fractions of a day," whereas calendrics is "the reckoning of time over extended peri-

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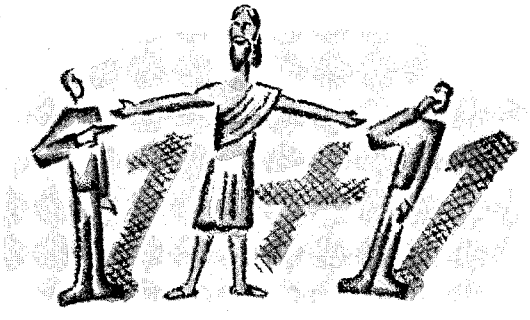
ods," the day being the smallest calendrical unit of time.)

Every proponent of 2001 makes the same argument: Although the idea that a century begins on the 00 year may stem from an intuitive, odometric logic, it betrays the public's lack of mathematical sophistication. The first A.D. year was 1. Because there was no A.D. 0, one cannot begin the second century with A.D. 100, since that would leave only ninety-nine years in the first century. The second century must begin in 101, the third in 201, and so on. The crux of the 2000 versus 2001 debate lies in the controversial nature of the number zero.

The issue touches on history, number theory, religion, politics, and economics—all of it colored by Western chauvinism. The public (pro-2000) is seemingly overmatched by historians and newspaper editors (pro-2001). But the public has a few quiet allies: some astronomers, number theorists, a fourth-grade class in western Massachusetts, and people who count for a living. There are some mute allies as well: the sun, the moon, the stars—all the celestial bodies in the universe, which move to their own beat, caring little for the pronouncements of the Library of Congress or the editorial board of *The Times* of London.



TWO MONKS, ONE MISSING NUMBER

In the late fifth century A.D. Pope Gelasius, about to take over a Church of Rome that was pathetically ignorant of the Greek language, imported a Scythian monk whom he knew from Constantinople to translate documents in the papal archive. The monk was Dionysius Exiguus (roughly translated, "Denny the Runt"), who chose his name out of humility rather than because of small physical stature. A few decades later, working under Pope John I, Dionysius was translating from Greek into Latin the Easter tables drawn up by Saint Theophilus, of the Church of Alexandria, and his successor Saint Cyril. Easter is Christendom's most important movable feast, and its date is one of the most difficult to calculate. Dionysius was using the Alexandrian method to calculate his own Easter tables when the thought struck him that he was living in the 525th year since the birth of Christ. The monk saw the opportunity to dispense with the old numbering system—Anno Diocletiani, in which years were counted from the beginning of the reign of that Roman Emperor. Diocletian was an infamous persecutor of Christians, and Dionysius did not want to memorialize him further. He began his new era with 1 Anno Domini, which he calculated as the year of Jesus' birth, and never looked back. Dionysius didn't bother to number the years B.C., "before Christ." He gave Christianity a fresh start.

Dionysius has been accused of two blunders—or a blunder and a half. He was wrong about Jesus' birth date, now set somewhere in the range of 7 to 3 B.C., the consensus being 4 B.C. (Glen Bowersock, a professor of ancient history at the Institute for Advanced Study, in Princeton, New Jersey, says, "Just remember the jingle 'Hark the herald angels roar, / Christ was born in B.C. four.'") Regardless, Dionysius made an important contribution. "From a Christian point of view," says William Klingshirn, the chair of the Department of Greek and Latin at Catholic University, "time started all over again with the birth of Christ. Getting out from under the Roman calendar was very significant." He points out that Muslims begin their calendar with the flight of Mohammed. Year 1 of the Muslim calendar is the year of the Hegira (A.D. 622). Judaism has Western civilization's most ancient calendar, more than 5,000 years old, dating back to when, according to interpreters of Scripture, God created the world. "It's no accident that these great monotheistic religions have starting points that they now celebrate," Klingshirn says. "It's really central to them that time ought to start anew, since there's one religion, one God."

Arguably, Dionysius's other "blunder" is that he began with A.D. 1 rather than 0. The Scythian monk is often defended as having been merely a product of his times: the Romans possessed no zero in their cumbersome numbering system. In our modern base-ten system zeroes abound: in 10, 20, 100, 1,000, and so on. So to say that a culture had no zero seems absurd. But the Romans in A.D. 525 had only Roman numerals: X (10), XX (20), C (100), M (1,000), and so on. There was no Roman numeral for zero. Making the year of Jesus' birth 0 would have solved many problems, but it is mathematically acceptable to begin a series with 1—or 2, or 3, or any number—as long as one is consistent and no numbers are skipped.

In any case, the A.D. system was not an instant success. Pope John died a year later, and anti-Greek sentiment in Rome swept Dionysius, his calendar, and all his Eastern colleagues out of office. Anno Domini languished for 200 years, until Bede, the Northumbrian Anglo-Saxon monk, picked up Dionysius's system and popularized it in his classic work, the *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, completed in 731. The A.D. system spread when the Emperor Charlemagne adopted it for dating acts of government throughout Europe.

The Venerable Bede made a blunder of his own. Attempting to improve upon Dionysius's system by completing it, he invented the B.C. system to extend backward before Jesus.

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Like Dionysius, Bede was hampered by the lack of a zero. He stuck 1 B.C. immediately before A.D. 1. This made no more sense than counting backward from 2001 directly to 1999, skipping 2000. The result is a year-numbering system with a year missing in the middle, a mathematical oddity that has endured for more than twelve centuries.

If Dionysius and Bede skipped a number, then we must either admit the mistake and correct it or extend the mistake into the next millennium by beginning centuries in the 01 year. Our experts have chosen the latter course, thus overlooking the salient mathematical shortcomings of Western culture in the first millennium A.D. Neither Dionysius nor Bede had zero, though the Indians and the Maya had been using it since approximately the first century.

The we-don't-need-a-year-0 argument takes two forms. The first is that no one ever referred to a year 0 while living in that year. True enough. But no one ever knowingly lived in 1 B.C. either. In fact, A.D. 1 wasn't labeled until the sixth century, because Dionysius hadn't yet invented his system. Let's forget about that argument. Numbering schemes often take effect after the fact. Who knows what year 1997 will become when the calendar is revised by, say, the Church of Scientology in the next century?

The second argument is that zero isn't a real number—that people just don't count with it. It can be skipped with impunity. The Library of Congress states categorically, "In fact, there has never been a system of recording reigns, dynasties, or eras that did not designate its first year as the year 1." This statement appears not to be true.

Anthony Aveni, a professor of astronomy and anthropology at Colgate University, points out that the Maya used year 0s in their calendars and, in fact, began each month with a day 0. Confronted with this fact, the no-year-0 proponent Owen Gingerich, a professor of astronomy and the history of science at the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics, replied dismissively, "Oh, well, the Maya . . ."

"We have a parochial view," Aveni says. "We're caught up with the Greco-Roman ways of doing things. It's in our nature not to think of nothingness."

The Babylonian Kings called the first year of a reign the accession year. The following year was 1. Dean Ware, a professor of medieval history at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, says that even in medieval England reigns didn't always begin with the year 1. Sometimes the second year was 1. Sometimes the accession year was 1—but only if the King ascended during the first part of the year. Sometimes the year 1 didn't begin until the King had done something significant. Which for some English Kings could be a long time.

Though Ware is firmly in the 2001 camp, he says the fact that there is no year 0 is a "fallibility." "It's awkward," he says, "that those two ones run together." He warns students to be alert: for example, the interval between the capture of Rome by the Gauls, in 390 B.C., and its capture by the Visigoths, in A.D. 410, is 799, not 800, years. To reckon the years between a B.C. date and an A.D. date add the two years together and subtract one to compensate for the lack of 0.

An embarrassing gaffe along these lines was committed by *The Washington Post* last year in yet another article explaining how "pretty simple" math dictates that the millennium must begin in 2001. The *Post* went on to declare that since Jesus was born in 4 B.C., the year 1996 marks 2,000 years since his birth. No. The math is, in fact, pretty simple, but the correct answer is 1,999 years.

CALENDARS AND THE COSMOS

ASTRONOMERS have solved this problem by revising Bede's numbers to make room for a year 0. In 1740 the French astronomer Jacques Cassini replaced B.C.-A.D. with a minus-plus system, in which 0 replaces 1 B.C., 2 B.C. becomes –1, and so on. All the A.D. years remain numerically the same. Cassini also said that centuries begin on the 00 year. For this the Library of Congress has noted that astronomers have been blamed for some of the "confusion."

They had little choice. Consider Halley's Comet, whose journey brings it past our planet approximately every seventy-five years. The comet cannot accommodate Bede's sloppy math, or the preferences of the Library of Congress, by truncating its orbit and losing a year as it crosses the B.C.-A.D. interface. Eclipses and all other periodic astronomical events are also affected. In addition, when Bede bypassed zero, he lost not just a year but a year *and a day*. Yes, in the Cassini calendar the year 0 is a leap year.

Dean Ware makes the point that calendars don't have to follow nature. One of our country's finest calendarists, LeRoy Doggett, who was the head of the Nautical Almanac Office at the U.S. Naval Observatory until his death, last year, wrote that some calendars replicate astronomical cycles, but some don't. The calendars that we in the West have followed have purported to mirror the rhythm of the heavens. In that sense, Doggett wrote, "Calendars serve as a link between mankind and the cosmos."

The calendar we use today was created by Julius Caesar, modified shortly thereafter by Augustus, and modified again by Pope Gregory in the sixteenth century. The present Gregorian calendar still closely resembles Julius's original effort. "In the sixteenth century calendars were very much at the

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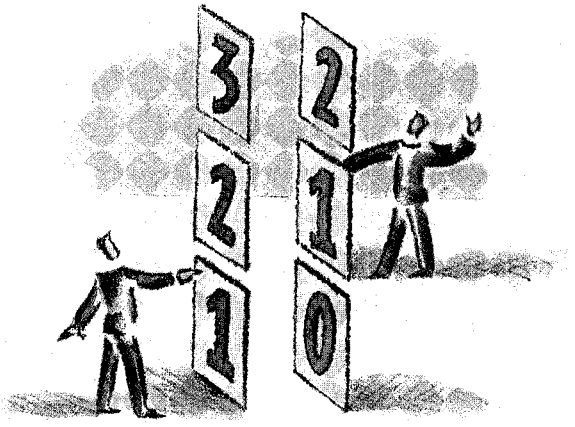
front edge of intellectual life," says Tony Grafton, a historian at Princeton University. "You had to know how the calendar worked. There were major differences between Catholics and Protestants. But now it's all stuff printed in your pocket calendar." The Protestants objected to all the saints' days, when people weren't allowed to work. And not everyone during the Renaissance was happy with the A.D. system. The great Lutheran astronomer Johannes Kepler dated his most important book, *Astronomia Nova*, 1609 "Anno Aerae Dionysianae" rather than "Anno Domini," because he believed the calendar numbers were ordained by Dionysius, not by God.

Meanwhile, owing to Julius Caesar's leap years, the Church's movable feasts were backsliding through the year. Julius had instituted a leap year every four years. Over a long period that's too many, because the solar year isn't quite 365.25 days, and by the sixteenth century the calendar was ten days out of sync with the earth's orbit around the sun. Pope Gregory authorized that ten days be excised from the year 1582—October 5 through October 14—and decreed that leap days not be added in centennial years not divisible by 400. (Ergo 1600 and 2000 are leap years; 1700, 1800, and 1900 are not.) Not all countries agreed immediately. England did not drop the extra days until 1752. George Washington, born under the Julian calendar but still an English citizen when the Gregorian calendar was adopted, ended up with two birthdays, both of which have now been supplanted by President's Day. The Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics, Owen Gingerich says, avoids the confusion by celebrating Copernicus' birthday, February 19, instead.

The Gregorian reform was the last straw for some astronomers. "What are we supposed to say?" Anthony Aveni asks. "'There was no sky for ten days'?" Many astronomers don't use Cassini's minus-plus system, favoring instead the Julian day calendar developed by Joseph Justus Scaliger in 1583. It begins counting time in 4713 B.C. and takes it day by day. Each day gets a new number; years are irrelevant. With the Julian day calendar, Aveni says, "I have a perfect system for reckoning the time from, say, one perihelion of Halley's Comet to the next. I don't have to worry about leap years." We are now closing in on 2.5 million Julian days. Scaliger chose 4713 B.C. as a starting point for various technical reasons and because it was sufficiently early to accommodate the declaration by Archbishop Ussher of Armagh that the world was created in 4004 B.C. It was amply early for astronomers, whose earliest recorded sightings, in the form of the Venus Tablets of Ammizaduga, showing the positions of Venus during the reign of the Babylonian King, date back to around the seventeenth century B.C.

Still, the Library of Congress hangs tough, insisting that our calendar is based on sound "simple arithmetic." Ruth Freitag continues to assert, despite the Maya and the Babylonian and English Kings, that no one counts with zero: "This is not how people count. People count by starting with one." Even today this may not be true.



COUNTING WITH ZERO

JUST up the road from Dean Ware's office at the University of Massachusetts sits the Mark's Meadow Elementary School, which serves as a lab school for the university's School of Education. Like many elementary schools across the United States, it begins not with Grade 1 but with a kind of Grade 0, called kindergarten. But that's not the point. Darryll McCall teaches fourth grade at Mark's Meadow. He assured me that although many of his fourth-graders are familiar with negative numbers, they have not yet been formally schooled in their use. McCall asked each student in his class to write down in order the numbers from +5 to –5. We wanted to see if the students would follow Library of Congress mathematics and count down without the use of zero. No luck. Out of sixteen students, thirteen included 0 between +1 and –1. Owen Gingerich was no more impressed with the fourth-graders than he was with the Maya. "Totally irrelevant!" he said. I went in search of more-acceptable counters—preferably adult, preferably non-Mayan.

Rob Navias, a shuttle-launch commentator for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, assured me that no rocket or spaceship, in America or abroad, has ever blasted off on the count of one. All spacecraft, he said, manned or unmanned, in all nations, blast off at zero. In America the zero serves as a crossover point between the staff at Cape Canaveral, in Florida, which is in charge of launches, and that at the Johnson Space Center, in Houston, which is in charge of the actual flights. Cape Canaveral counts down to zero for launch; Houston counts back up for mission elapsed time. "Space flight *is* numbers. Zero is a part of that," Navias says.

Michael Jordan-Reilly, of the Otis Elevator Company, told me that his firm will number floors in whatever manner its customers request. In America the ground floor is usually counted as one. But Europeans, Jordan-Reilly says, generally begin with zero, as in ground zero, under a variety of names. There's a certain logic to this. The first floor is one flight up. The eighth floor is eight floors up—not seven floors up, as in America. Jordan-Reilly points out that American floor numbering is often quirky: casino and hotel owners commonly skip the thirteenth floor, out of superstition.

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Darryll McCall asks, "Is zero a number?" Is it a real integer, a counting number, or just a vertical line on a time line? Tony Grafton, of Princeton, sees zero for calendrical purposes as a line between increments rather than as an increment per se. I called the math department at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology to find out the proper way to count and whether zero is a real number. Apparently, counting is not MIT's forte. I was told that no one in the math department would comment on that topic. As for zero, a department administrator said, "Our people are interested more in numbers invented after 1972." He told me I needed a number theorist.

Tobias Dantzig wrote the classic cultural history of numbers, *Number: The Language of Science* (1930), which is still in print. "In the history of culture," Dantzig wrote, "the discovery of zero will always stand out as one of the greatest single achievements of the human race." Zero, he said, marked a "turning point" in math, science, and industry. Dantzig also noted that zero was invented not in Europe but in India, in the early centuries after Jesus. Negative numbers followed soon thereafter. The Maya invented zero in the New World at approximately the same time. Europe did not accept zero as a number until the twelfth or thirteenth century. Tony Grafton, of Princeton, bristles at the idea that not having a zero was significant. "Having a year zero is not a sign of sophistication," he insists.

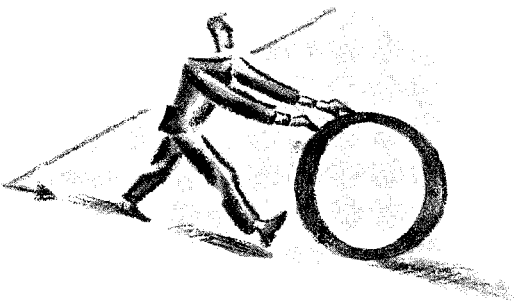
But European mathematics was hampered for centuries by the lack of zero. Dantzig wrote that it was difficult to determine which numbering system was worse, the Greek or the Roman. "Neither was capable of creating an arithmetic that could be used by a man of average intelligence," he wrote. Without zero and negative numbers René Descartes could not have developed analytic geometry and the familiar analytical diagram with x and y axes. Without analytic geometry we wouldn't have the work of Newton, Leibniz, Euler, or the Bernoullis. Zero can also be an ordinal number. Mathematicians feel as comfortable with "zero'th" as with "first."

Barry Mazur, a mathematician at Harvard University, says that a numbering system that leapfrogs over zero reminds him of *Out of Africa*, by Isak Dinesen, in which the author was taught Swahili by a young Swedish dairyman. Her mentor taught her all the numbers except nine, because, he explained, there was no nine in Swahili. There was eight; there were ten, eleven, and so on. But no nine. Dinesen believed her teacher in part because her houseboy was missing a finger; she thought that perhaps it was a self-inflicted amputation, to facilitate counting on the fingers. As it turned out, the teacher had skipped nine because its sound in Swahili was vulgar to the Swedish ear. "Mathematicians, of course," Mazur says, "prefer it if the numbers are all there."

"They have not got nine in Swahili," the dairyman told Dinesen. He might have added, "They have not got zero in the Dionysius-Bede calendar"—the difference being that in the latter case he would have been telling the truth.

The Greeks, Dantzig wrote, "could not conceive the void as a number let alone endow the void with a symbol." This shortcoming hampered Western physics, too, for well over a thousand years. The pre-Socratic Greek philosopher Democritus of Abdera put forth the idea of a void ("Nothing exists except atoms and empty space; everything else is opinion"). Plato, however, disagreed, and Democritus' particle physics was abandoned in the West until the Renaissance. Chris Quigg, a physicist at the theoretical division of the Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory, in Batavia, Illinois, says, "Nothingness is essential to physics. The vacuum is essential to the way we understand the world. Zero is a very important concept."

Even the occasional calendarist agrees. The Jesuit Peter Archer broke with the usual system in his book *The Christian Calendar and the Gregorian Reform* (1941), inserting a year 0 before A.D. 1 and calling it the first year of the Christian Era. Like astronomers, he made it a leap year. Archer wrote that a date in this first year should be stated in terms of months and days only, "just as the age of an infant in its first year is given in terms of months and days." His book carries the imprimatur of Archbishop Francis J. Spellman. This means, William Klingshirn, of Catholic University, says, that there is "no theological problem with the work, no impediment to the faith or morals of a Catholic." It doesn't mean that the book is true, Klingshirn says—but Catholics are free to celebrate the new millennium in 2000. "The Church is accommodating when nothing important is at stake," he says. As for Cassini's year 0: "Scientists need not observe a calendar based on Christianity."



THE MILLENNIUM ACCORDING TO GREENWICH

THE Royal Greenwich Observatory continues to insist that there was no year 0 and that the millennium begins in 2001. Although it is the ultimate arbiter of timekeeping, the RGO has little authority in the area of calendrics. One calendarist likens a timekeeper's pronouncements on the calendar to a particle physicist's opinions on cosmology—relevant, perhaps, but not authoritative.

Kristen Lippincott, the director of the Millennium Project at the Old Royal Observatory, from whose geographic coordinates Greenwich Mean Time is measured (and the RGO's

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former home), insists that the RGO *is* an authority. She compares it to "authorities from previous ages who might cite Aristotle, Ptolemy, or Bede." In settling on 2001 and renouncing zero the RGO has made a significant break with its past and with geography. One of the RGO's most illustrious directors was the fifth astronomer royal, Nevil Maskelyne (1732–1811), who stated that a century begins on the 00 year. The Old Royal Observatory sits atop the prime meridian, also known as zero—not one—longitude.

Lippincott argues that the RGO's determination on when the day, and thus the century, begins is based on international law. According to the transcripts of the International Meridian Conference of 1884, legally the Universal Day does not begin until it is "mean midnight at the crosshairs of the Airy Transit Circle in the Old Royal Observatory."

For the sake of argument, let's accept the legal definition: the millennium begins on January 1, 2001, at Greenwich. Now, imagine yourself vacationing in Tonga, near the International Date Line, where it is twelve hours earlier than it is in Greenwich, on the night of December 31, 2000. At the stroke of midnight, as the schoolchildren light their coconut-sheath torches, your digital watch turns from December 31 to January 1, 2001. Happy New Year! Happy New Millennium! No. Because it's still noon on December 31 in Greenwich, the millennium hasn't started yet. Legally, it's still *yesterday*. And it will remain yesterday until noon Tonga time, all evidence to the contrary. In fact, in all twelve time zones east of Greenwich midnight will come sooner than at the Royal Greenwich Observatory, but it will stay yesterday until midnight Greenwich Mean Time. This may not be how the world turns, but it's the official position of the observatory.

On the East Coast of the United States, five hours behind Greenwich, the new millennium will start at 7:00 P.M. Those people who celebrate midnight in Times Square will be five hours late. Californians must celebrate the new millennium at 4:00 P.M., while stuck in rush-hour traffic. "I guess we're seeing the last vestiges of British imperialism," Klingshirn says.

Can one celebrate 2000 without fear of censure from the RGO? Certainly, with the necessary cash. The RGO has set up an office in Greenwich, Connecticut, to sign up corporate sponsors for the observatory. The RGO's American representative, Stephanie Record, says she is looking for Fortune 500 companies that do business with the United Kingdom to become financial sponsors of the RGO. For a fee they will be able to display a special "Greenwich Meridian 2000" logo. Greenwich 2000? Not 2001? "We're loosening up the dogma," Record says. "Our purpose is to draw sponsors. Frankly, the year 2000 appeals to more people." The RGO plans to hold a year-long celebration in 2000, culminating with New Year's Eve on December 31, to usher in the *real* new millennium for its corporate sponsors. Some may get to ride the *Concorde*, celebrating midnight over Greenwich, England, and then jetting to the United States to celebrate midnight again over Greenwich, Connecticut, five hours later. (But wait: doesn't the millennium start at 7:00 P.M. U.S. East Coast time? "Don't write that in the article," Record pleaded.)

Last winter I was pulling out of the parking lot of the Friendly's restaurant in Hadley, Massachusetts, when the odometer of my thirteen-year-old car turned from 99,999 miles to 100,000. I pointed this out to my ten-year-old son, who sat beside me. He was thrilled. I bought the car in 1984 with 000007 on the odometer, but the dealer assured me that the seven miles were from incidental driving—test runs inside the factory, driving the car onto a transport truck, a boat, and so forth—and that the odometer began life at 000000. I like to think that this is because it's a German car: the Kaiser broke with most of Europe in 1899, proclaiming that the twentieth century would begin in 1900. But I've been assured that American cars, and even Japanese cars, also begin life with an odometer reading of 000000, never 000001. About a mile down the road, as I passed Dean Ware's office, I tried an experiment. Screaming, yelling, and bouncing up and down with as much excitement as I could muster, I shouted, "Look! 100001!" My son hardly looked up from his book. "What's your point?" he said.

Think how history might have changed had the Venerable Bede driven a BMW, with all those lovely odometric zeroes laid out in front of him. Bede achieved one of the great near misses in mathematics. By counting years "before Christ," he in effect became the Western inventor of negative numbers. Had he taken the logical next step and invented zero, he could have forestalled our current calendrical problems and accelerated Western thought by several centuries. He could also have made a significant contribution to Christianity. The word "zero" is derived indirectly from the Indian word "*sunya*." *Sunyata* is a profound Buddhist concept: it means emptiness, the void, the essence of all things, the mother of all existence from which everything is born and into which everything must return. Zero was no less profound for the Maya. In Mayan hieroglyphics archaeologists have found a flowerlike symbol, a central element with four lobes, which they believe stands for zero. Barbara Fash, of Harvard University's Peabody Museum, says the flower's center point is a "bed of creation." For the Maya, who believed in cyclical rather than linear time, zero marked both the beginning and the completion of a cycle. Zero was a flower. All life grew out of it.

Bede could have created a zero for the zero'th year of the Christian era, with a symbol that represented not only zero but also the man he considered to be the son of God. In our everyday calculations and reckonings all of us—Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, atheists—would have been continually confronted by Jesus.

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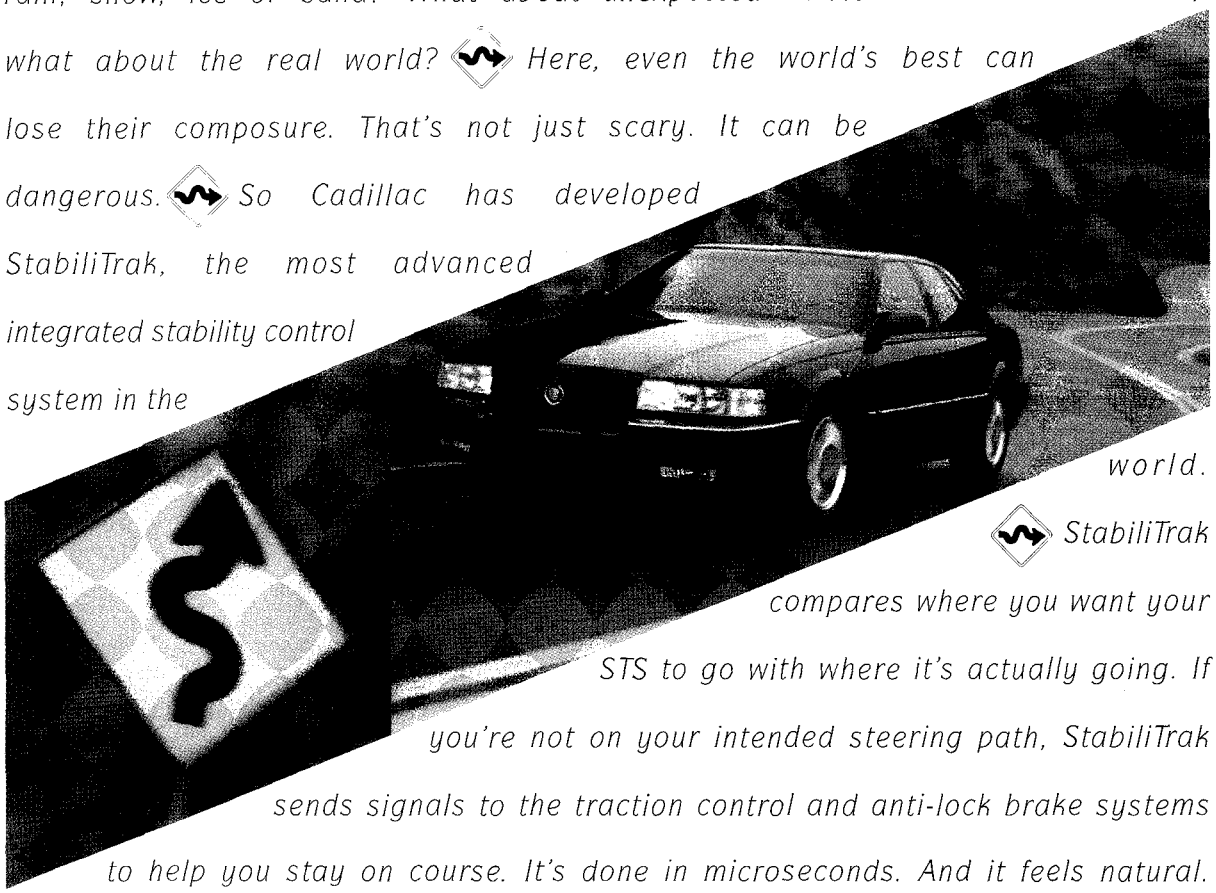

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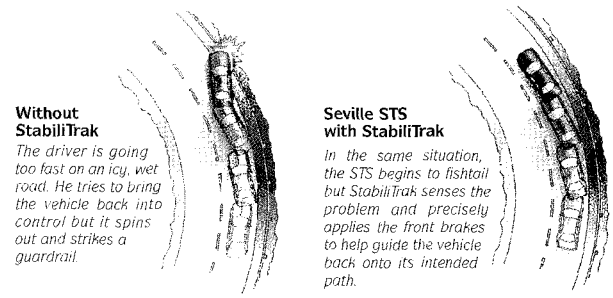

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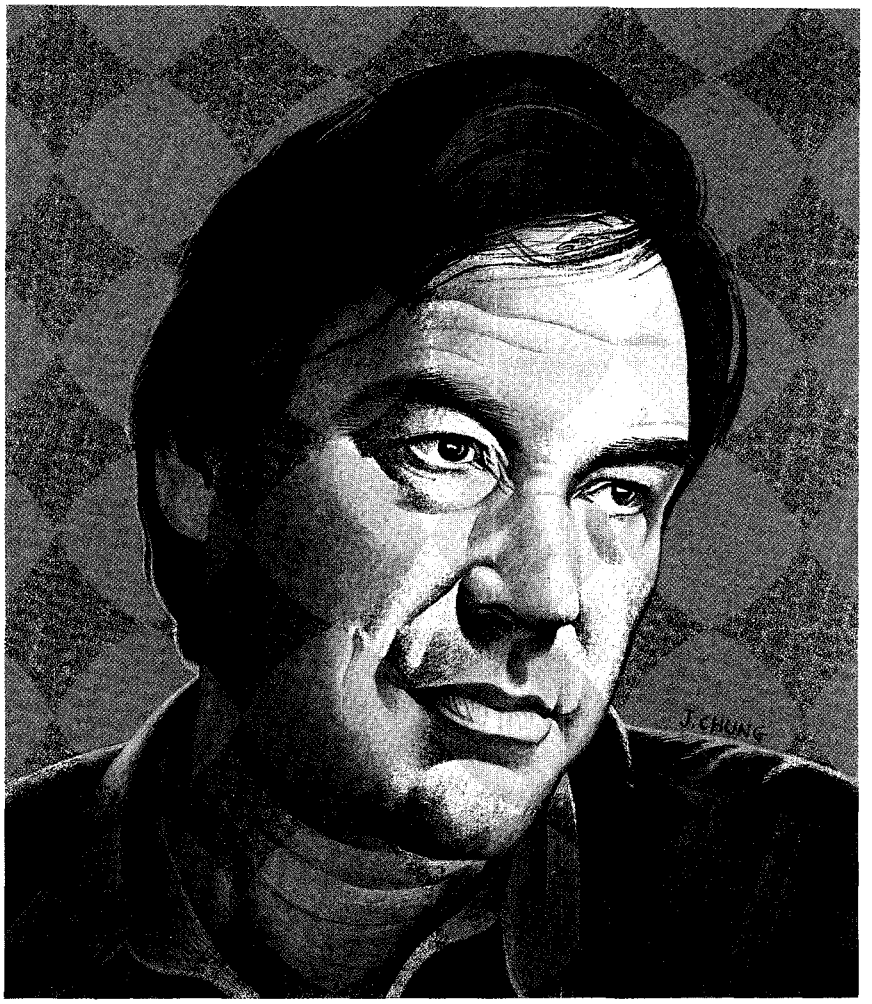

Dostoyevsky Behind a Camera

Oliver Stone is making great American novels on film

by Garry Wills

OLIVER Stone makes movies out of the day's headlines. That is usually a prescription for the shallow or the ephemeral. A dozen or so conspiracy films came out after President John F. Kennedy was killed, but only one continues to nag at people's minds. Movies about sex and drugs in the sixties are painful to watch now, but *The Doors* has survived. Stone with some of his movies seemed to be writing future headlines, as when *Wall Street* and *Talk Radio* anticipated later developments. Newspapers can have trouble keeping up with him.

How do Stone's timely things stay fresh in a culture that devours its past, forgetting it daily? There is a feel for timeless narrative patterns in Stone's work, connected with his film-school training in the genres. *JFK*, for instance, is a mystery story. The prosecutor's speech (which runs for more than half an hour) is like William Powell's gathering of all the suspects to go over evidence in the final reel of a *Thin Man* film. *Wall Street* is *Father Knows Best*, a tale as ancient as the Prodigal Son and as commercially sturdy as the Andy Hardy series. *The Doors* tells the story of an artist torn between a good woman (his muse) and an evil woman who destroys him.

Natural Born Killers takes movies like Buster Keaton's *Sherlock Jr.* and Woody Allen's *Purple Rose of Cairo* and stands them on their heads. In those films people escape into movie dreams, mingling with the celluloid figures. In *Killers* the images leap off the screen to swallow up their viewers. Movies themselves are the monsters that devour the world.

People tend not to notice that Stone relies on such film clichés, because he imports into them not only newspapers from below but also a mysticism from above. He is constantly suggesting cosmic showdowns behind or beyond the newsy events and the genres. Improbable martyrs and gurus haunt the screen—the saintly photographer in *Salvador*, the Dionysiac Elias in *Platoon*, Ingmar Bergman figures of Death in *The Doors* and *Natural Born Killers*.

This mixture of apparently disparate materials—scandal and spiritualism, current events and eternal recurrences—is not promising on the face of it; but Stone arranges his scripts in a three-tiered system that gives layers of meaning to the stories he tells. Above the current events is an ordinating pattern taken from cinema typology. And above those types is a "war in heaven" of clashing spiritual principles.

Where have we seen this three-tiered approach before? Who else took plots out of trashy news reports, used the narrative conventions of melodrama, and topped the confection with the gaunt monks and foolish seers of an idiosyncratic religiosity? Dostoyevsky, too, has been accused of a bogus spirituality—as when Vladimir Nabokov denounced his characters for "sinning their way to Jesus." Dickensian plots and Victorian clichés (the good-hearted prostitute, for example)

Illustration by Joo Chung

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are his equivalents of Andy Hardy sentiment in Stone's work. But both men set this material ablaze with fierce energies.

Dostoyevsky's three tiers are evident in a work like *The Demons*. This story of radical plotters was taken from contemporary politics (in surprisingly accurate detail). But its complex elements are unified around the generic story of a doomed Byronic hero (which made Dostoyevsky first call his novel *The Life of a Great Sinner*). Finally, high in the sky over this local tale, the fate of Russia is being decided in a struggle with the demons who possess the great sinner, Stavrogin. Exorcised from Stavrogin, devils rush into his accomplices—as demonic spirits were driven into swine at Gadara, according to the Gospel of Saint Luke, from which Dostoyevsky takes his novel's epigraph.

That is the kind of storytelling that Stone is up to in *Natural Born Killers*. The script he began with, by Quentin Tarantino, is a shocker from our TV culture, the tale of a true-crime program that promotes the careers of the young serial killers Mickey (Woody Harrelson) and Mallory (Juliette Lewis). The TV host, Wayne Gale (Robert Downey Jr.), is the main character in Tarantino's little fable of media sensationalism; the killers have no psychic history at all. Stone provides a whole new layer of narrative, using the archetypal "they made me a criminal" pattern. As Bonnie and Clyde were the crippled cripplers of others (Clyde impotent and lame, Bonnie the victim of a despotically puritanical upbringing), Mickey and Mallory were victimized by violent parents in their childhood. But where Bonnie's father was repressive, Mallory's was leering and sexually aggressive. In flashbacks she remembers the killing of her parents as a sitcom like *Married With Children*. Mickey's physically threatening parents are also remembered in flashbacks, which make him feel guilty for his father's suicide. Their police stalker, Jack Scagnetti (Tom Sizemore), also carries the guilt of his mother's death (she was killed by the Texas Tower mass murderer); his dreams actually mingle with Mickey's.

Mickey and Jack are mirror images of each other, prey and hunter—Jack even kills a prostitute in order to enter into Mickey's mind. But then Stone imposes his top layer of spiritual meaning on the story, taking Mickey onto a plane entirely beyond Jack. Mickey and Mallory try to escape the media-polluted world of their upbringing by a return to nature—marrying each other above a huge canyon, seeking wisdom in the desert. They encounter a Native American shaman whose hogan has no TV, no newspaper, no telephone—just a great opening through the roof into heaven. Violence has scarred the shaman, as Mallory finds when she picks up a picture of his son, killed in Vietnam. But he has conquered his demons, just as he tamed the snakes in his desert home. He tries to drive the demons from Mallory; but Mickey, dreaming of his father's death, kills the shaman in his stupor. Mallory shouts "Bad! Bad! Bad!" at him, at a loss for a moral language to convey what she is only dimly aware of: "You killed life." The tamed snakes come alive with punitive hissings and bite the two. They seek a cure but don't find it, since they have been infected with tragic knowledge, and—as Stone says of this sequence—no pharmacy has an antidote for that.

After their capture and trial, Mickey and Mallory communicate their new awareness to each other, even though they are kept in separate cells. Tarantino's script had no room for such growth in the characters. In fact, Tarantino's Mickey, acting as his own attorney at the trial, kills a witness on the stand. Stone filmed that scene but did not use it, because it denied the changes wrought in Mickey by the shaman. Mickey's next violence will be against Jack and the prison warden, who have planned to kill him in a rigged escape attempt. But before that Wayne, the TV host, is given a live interview with Mickey. As the show progresses and Mickey denounces the institutionalized violence of our society, the devils go out of him into the listening prisoners—just as the demons of Stavrogin entered the nihilists around him. The apocalyptic riot that brings down the prison is a cleansing destruction of the system, like the healing ordeal that Dostoyevsky envisioned for his Russia.

Stone's movie, it is said, is too violent to be an indictment of violence—as Dostoyevsky was too complicitous in Stavrogin's beautiful destructiveness. But Stone's violence is stylized, done in the form of trashy media: comic-book wounds, bullets frozen in air, movies within movie-poisoned brains.

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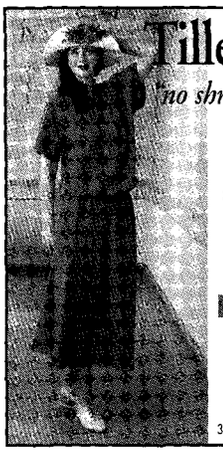

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That a study of violent fantasies is taking the form of fantasy becomes clear in the garage scene where Mallory imagines that the man at the gas pump is Mickey. Mallory is angry because Mickey, in the pre-desert days, has proposed a sexual threesome with a female hostage. Imagining the attendant pumping gas into her car as Mickey raping the nonexistent hostage, she throws herself back on the hood of a sports car, to which she beckons the attendant to be killed. The blending of cars with sex and violence has been a staple of the advertising world for most of this century, but no commentary on the phenomenon has had the biting wit of this sequence—crowned when Jack Scagnetti, intuiting Mallory's body in the lines of the car, strokes it erotically.

WARNER BROS. (COURTESY KOBAL)

The natural-born killers

Yet this whole garage sequence is done with no nudity, no pornography in the presentation of the advertising world's pornographic strategies. In fact, there was no nudity in the film's theatrical release, and only one topless shot, of the prostitute Jack kills, in the director's cut (standard fare for R-rated films). There is no drinking in the film, no homosexuality in the vicious prison, no drugs but the mushrooms Mickey takes in the desert. This is a world *all and only* violent, except for the interlude of peace at the shaman's hut. It is a world given over to demons, and the demons inhabit the media. Bob Dole denouncing the media was a piker next to this film, which makes his point a thousand times more forcibly.

It is true, nonetheless, that Stone brings an excess of rage to his work, not unlike Mickey's. That is because he, like Mickey, feels betrayed by his parents and their world. Though he was shunted to boarding schools in his boyhood, and to his grandparents in France for the summer, Stone never suspected that his parents' marriage was a sham covering up their affairs with other partners—not, that is, until his father's ex-secretary called him at boarding school to say that his father and mother were getting divorced and could not be reached by him. This disillusioning shock, delivered when he was sixteen, was followed by another when he was seventeen—the assassination of President Kennedy. He told his biographer, James Riordan: "To see his candle snuffed out so early and viciously was such a shock. I had no faith in my parents' generation after that." When I asked Stone if it is fair to say that the divorce and the assassination worked together to make him feel that his world was coming apart, he said, "Yes, that's fair." Later, when he examined the circumstances of Kennedy's death, he found that all was not as it had seemed: "My life was like that, uncovering what was *really* going on between my mother and my father—they were not *really* lovers."

So disoriented was Stone by such blows that he gave up on Yale after a year and went to Vietnam as an English teacher in the Catholic school system. After his return to America he buried himself ("like Dostoyevsky," he says) in writing his version of *Underground Man*. Rejection of the novel by publishers drove Stone to despair, and he volunteered to go back to Vietnam as an infantryman. "It was suicidal, though I would not pull the trigger on myself." After he was wounded twice in Vietnam, his death wish took him back to the front for a second time—but he returned to America, and to film school at New York University, with the materials he shaped later into *Platoon*.

ORION (COURTESY KOBAL)

Barnes "the war god"

There are no politics in *Platoon*, nothing about communism or dominoes or empire—just the grind and panic of war and the rub of frightened men against one another. The story pattern that Stone imposes on this is the clash of two leaders in a crisis situation—Mr. Christian against Captain Bligh on the *Bounty*, Odysseus against Agamemnon at Troy, Corporal Thomas against Sergeant Stryker in *Sands of Iwo Jima*. Stone draws directly on *Sands*, giving his Sergeant Barnes (Tom Berenger) John Wayne's slogans: "Saddle up! Lock and load!" Like Wayne, Barnes can boast, "I *am* reality."

Barnes is less vulnerable even than Wayne's character, who is killed by the enemy in *Sands*. The men in *Platoon* recognize that "the only thing that can kill Barnes is Barnes." Pitted against Barnes, the war god, is Sergeant Elias (Willem Dafoe), who is not opposed to the war—indeed, he has found an eerie serenity in the midst of his efficient killing. Barnes thinks that Elias has relaxed too much into a war that sickens Barnes to ruthlessness—Elias must be killed for the good of his own followers. Over the plot mechanics Stone has imposed the idea of a suffering Dionysus taken from Nietzsche and from Stone's study of Greek tragedy at NYU. Elias accepts death with the smile of Dionysus in Euripides' *The Bacchae*—a play Stone drew on and refers to in *The Doors*. In *Platoon*, Chris Tayler (Charlie Sheen), torn between "two fathers," has to become Barnes in order to destroy Barnes. He goes back to America with Elias in his heart but Barnes in his gut.

The student movie that Stone made in Martin Scorsese's class at NYU was unconsciously a preview of *Platoon*. Stone filmed himself as a Vietnam vet trying to purge the Barnes in him, going out to nature (the film changes from black and white to color) to shed his medals and bathe in cleansing waters, communing with his Elias side.

The search for a father is carried on in most of Stone's work. It is both private and public, reflecting the betrayals of his teens. This explains the fierce personal heat with which Stone engages public issues. Dostoyevsky drew on a similar private-public shock, undergone in his teens, when he lost his father. While Dostoyevsky was at engineering school, guilty over the funds he was draining from his father's struggling estate, the farm's serfs murdered the father for his stinginess—or so Dostoyevsky was given to believe (later evidence threw doubt on the matter). The public issue was the political discontent of the serfs. Dostoyevsky be-

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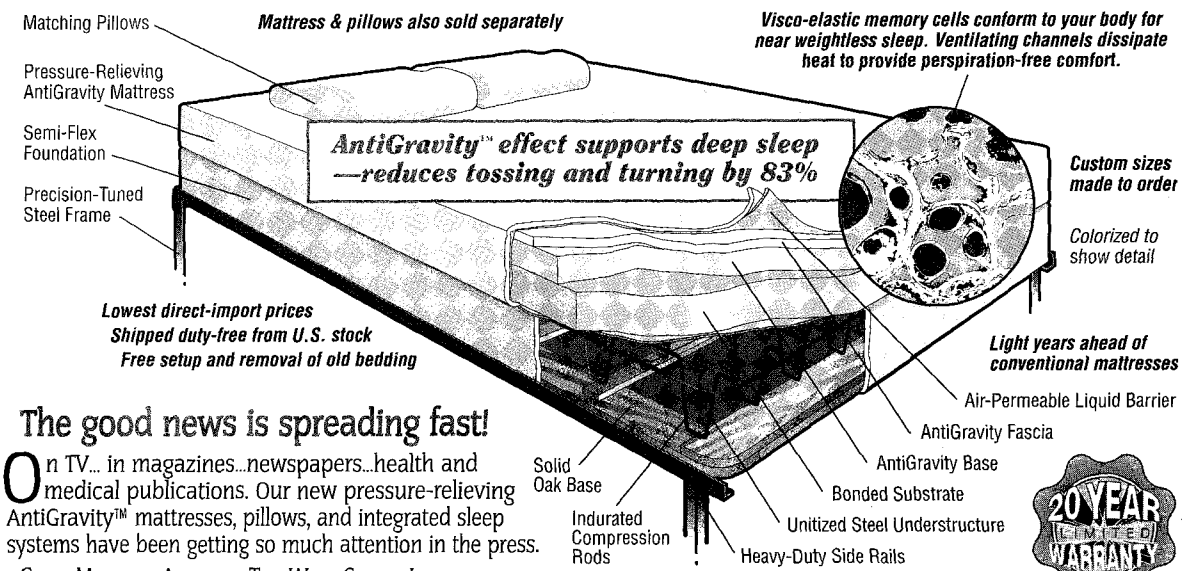

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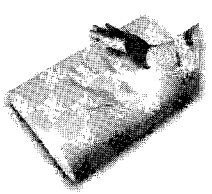

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came, overnight, a champion of their liberation, because he felt he had forced them to desperation by the competing financial demands he placed upon his father. The tangled guilt of the Karamazovs was born (in part) of this experience.

STONE'S feelings about his own father, Louis Stone, a New York stock analyst, are clearest in *Wall Street*. Charlie Sheen, as Bud Fox, is again torn between a commanding figure and a more humane one—the stock manipulator Gordon Gekko (Michael Douglas) and his own father, a union leader. Though the Andy Hardy pattern makes Fox see that his father's values are more important, forcing him to destroy Gekko (as Tayler destroyed Barnes), the Dionysian energy of Gekko has made him the hero of applicants to business schools and of the financial columnist for *National Review* (who writes under the pseudonym Gekko). Gekko is humanized by his love for his son (played by Stone's son Sean), his taste in art (better than that of his arty mistress), and his desire to get back at the Ivy League WASPs who tried to keep this City College product out of their clubs. Louis Stone—who changed his name from Silverstein, went to Yale, and repressed his writing talent in order to climb in the financial world—was a Gekko who failed and needed no destroying. But it is the act of forgiveness under the indictment that brings Gekko to life in *Wall Street*. Those who thought it a mere attack on Reagan's era of greed missed the conflicts within Stone's own sympathies. He does not tell simple stories.

20TH CENTURY FOX (COURTESY KOBAL)

Gekko and Fox on Wall Street

Yet he is constantly accused of doing that. Because he takes on serious topics, he is called a "message" director. But it is hard to see a political message in, say, *Platoon*. What would it be? That one must become a Barnes to defend an Elias—thus undercutting the point of defending Elias? Stone is also said to be obsessed with conspiracies, though his one conspiracy film, *JFK*, is so inclusive in its condemnation of everything but an implausibly pure John Kennedy and a ludicrously virtuous investigator, Jim Garrison (Kevin Costner), that the real conspiracy seems to be life itself. It was a touching if loony idea to turn the hard-drinking and womanizing Garrison into a kind of Atticus Finch, straight out of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, a poster boy for family values.

Family is the crucial link between public and private in Stone's work—as it was the nexus for his own sense of betrayal at home and, with Kennedy's assassination, in the country. In *Born on the Fourth of July* and *Heaven and Earth* mothers first send their sons to war and then reject what they become there. Parents terrorized the two who become terrorists in *Natural Born Killers*. In *Nixon*, Hannah Nixon cripples her son emotionally, far more than his father, Frank, abuses him physically.

The reaction to *Nixon* is a good example of the errors people fall into when they read Stone in an ideological way. Some took his movie as a political attack on Nixon, the way they took *Wall Street* as a political attack on Reagan. There is a minor role for conspiracy in *Nixon*—but Nixon (Anthony Hopkins) is more the victim of a Cuban-CIA tie than its mastermind. What matters in *Nixon* is the extended rethinking it gives to *Citizen Kane*. The connections to that film were noticed by reviewers but treated as mere addenda or ornaments stuck onto the tale extraneously. In fact the attempt to fathom the mystery of a mystery-less man has not been done better since the Welles classic. Both Kane and Nixon are incapable of intimacy. In the scene where Kane's mother gives him away to a guardian, the boy thrusts his sled between himself and the guardian. After that he is never seen embracing anyone, not even his wife or mistress. How he can manipulate people while distancing himself from them is the intriguing puzzle never solved by the movie. Nixon's panicky circling away from Pat (Joan Allen) as the camera pursues him is as affecting as his few pathetic lunges toward intimacy—the delusion that he found common ground with the protestors at the Lincoln Memorial, and his drowner's way of pulling Kissinger (Paul Sorvino) down with him into desperate prayer.

Nixon is really the story of two Nixon generations, of Hannah and Frank, of Pat and Dick—and of the latter pair's inability to escape the former. Nixon is a victim of shattered family values, as surely as is Mickey in *Natural Born Killers*. The difference between them is that Mickey can find release into the higher world of the shaman. When Nixon turns to his mother's religion of fear, it does not free him from self-imprisonment but locks the bolts tighter. The tragedy of Nixon is that the path to transcendence is sealed off by the false sanctity of his mother, who uses religion to control and stunt him.

Here is the deepest paradox of Stone's career. At a time when the religious right is attacking movies in general and him in particular, Stone is one of the few filmmakers who regularly treat religion in a serious way. Some refuse to consider his religious thrashings important, because (like Dostoyevsky's) they take exotic form—the religion found in and beyond excess, the Dionysiac serenity-in-violence of Elias, the Bacchic ecstasy of Jim Morrison, the Native American shamanism of *Natural Born Killers*, the saintly quest for truth by the photographer John (John Savage) in *Salvador*, the universal forgiveness of the Buddhists in *Heaven and Earth*. But these reflect serious preoccupations in Stone's life—he has been meditating with a Buddhist master for years. And they reflect an age-old strain of religion that finds those deeply engaged in life's conflicts more capable of vision than are the complacent. It is a truth the Christian right can find in its own Gospels: "Verily I say unto you that the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you" (Matthew 21:31). Nabokov might say that Stone's characters are "sinning their way to Buddha," but that is often the story of religion when it is real. When it is unreal, it becomes a temptation and a trap—not only the Christianity of Hannah Nixon but also the Judaism of the host in *Talk Radio*, who uses a lie about his ties with Israel to manipulate his audience. What is being attacked here is not Christianity or Judaism but the distortion of each for purposes of human domination.

If the secular saint Jim Garrison is totally unconvincing, it is because *JFK* alone of Stone's films has no complex

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character at its center. That, not the wacky theories it airs, is its real artistic failure. On the other hand, the photographer in *Salvador* is one of the few modern saints on film. A scene that reflects from an opposite pole the empty prayer of Nixon and Kissinger is that in which the morally despicable correspondent in *Salvador* (James Woods) clasps the hands of the dying John and accepts a higher sense of calling from him. (The scene reflects an earlier clasping of muddy hands, when the correspondent gave a dead church worker his own ring.)

In one of several interviews I have conducted with Stone, I said that I think of him as a moralist. At first he took it as an insult: "A moralist? You'll have to defend that." I meant that he engages issues with moral urgency. It is the difference between the script of an ironist (Tarantino) and the passionate film that Stone made of *Natural Born Killers*. Stone eventually accepted the "accusation" if it meant not that he tells others how to live but that he makes his characters try to give a responsible account of themselves. The selves being assessed are complex. Charlie Sheen's characters in *Platoon* and *Wall Street* contain both Elias and Barnes, both Gekko and Bud Fox's father. Mickey in *Killers* contains both the demons of his father and the shaman who fights demons. The heroine of *Heaven and Earth* (played by Hiep Le) contains two entirely different worlds, East and West, and wrestles them to a mutual forgiveness.

Heaven and Earth resists ideological reductionism. The heroine is violated more by the Viet Cong than by the French or the Americans, and the American husband she takes (Tommy Lee Jones) is more the victim of his own culture than an inflicter of it on others. She ends up realizing that a failure to forgive aggression is a deeper form of aggression, a yielding to the demons coming out of one's enemies. She reaches a sense of binding compassion like the vision of cosmic harmony at which Alyosha arrives in the foul world of the Karamazovs, or like Prince Myshkin's transcendence through suffering in *The Idiot*. This is not your ordinary two hours' traffic of the screen. It is more like what writers aspired to when they hoped to write the great American novel. Great novels are now being written with the camera—at least when Stone is behind the camera.

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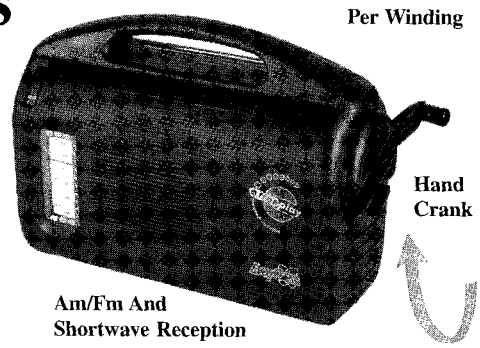

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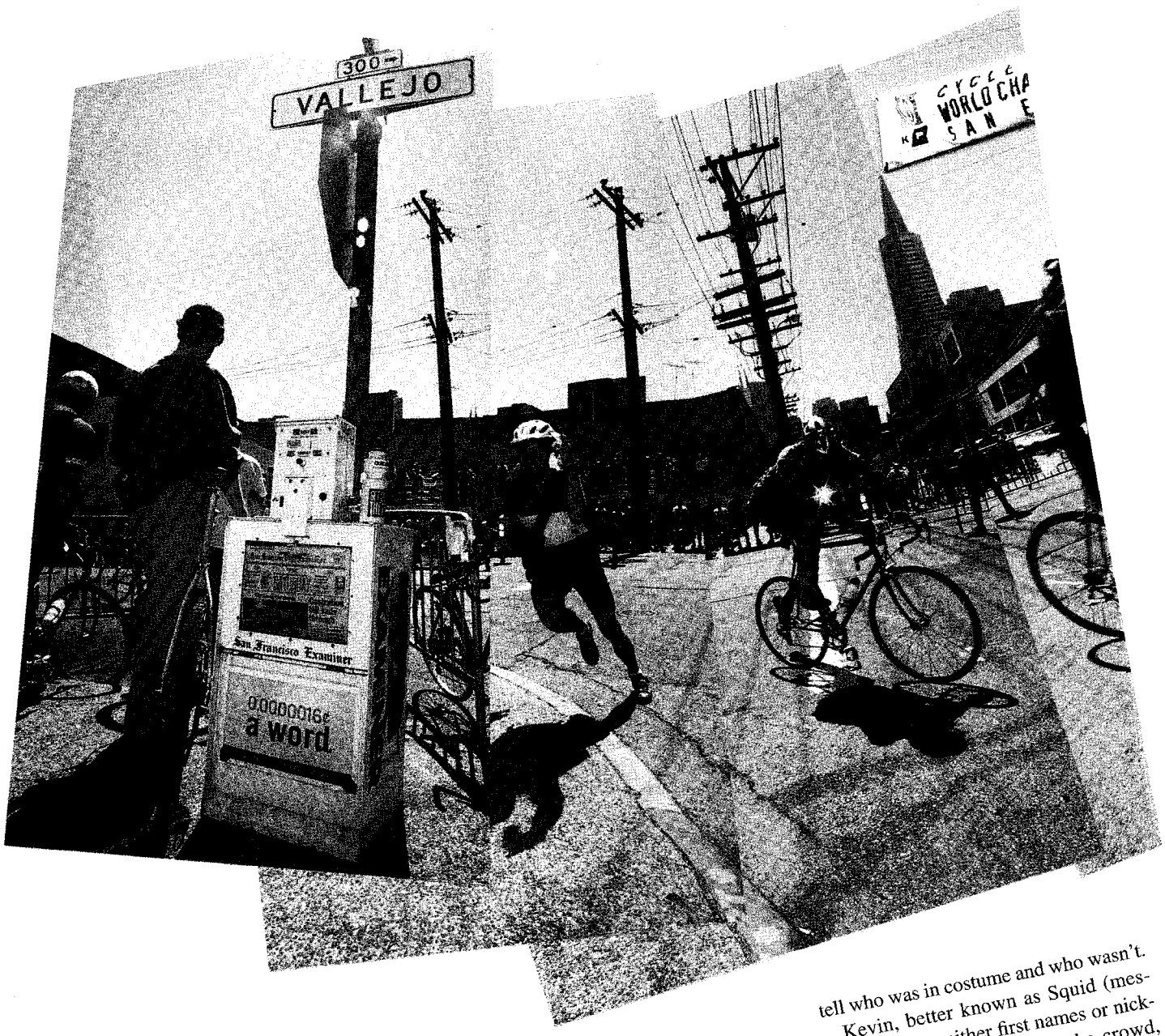

Alleycat Couriers

Bicycle messengers, daredevil scofflaws every day, are holding tournaments to see who can get through tough traffic fastest

by Marshall Jon Fisher

On the afternoon of last Halloween in Manhattan the rising tide of rush hour swept a curious group into Herald Square. The group's monster masks and black witch outfits appeared tame next to its everyday accessories: chains, leather, shaved heads, dreadlocks, and lip, tongue, and nose rings. And everyone had a bicycle: the square was cluttered with road bikes, mountain bikes, dilapidated ten-speeds, mint-fresh twenty-one-speeds, and customized fixed-gear bikes. At New York's second annual Halloween bicycle-messenger race it was hard to tell who was in costume and who wasn't.

Kevin, better known as Squid (messengers go by either first names or nicknames), circulated through the crowd, mild jitters evident beneath his ghoulish makeup. He had been one of the organizers of the event, in which riders would have to go through six checkpoints around the city, in any order, before finishing. They would face the ever-present danger of accidents and, of course, trouble from the police: it's not exactly legal to conduct a race through Manhattan rush-hour traffic.

As three o'clock approached, some twenty riders coalesced near the appointed landmark, a statue of Minerva. Riders of fixed-gear bicycles stood on their pedals like cowboys in their stirrups, making slow semicircles. (Cyclists can't coast on fixed-gear bikes; the pedals always move forward and backward with

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the wheels. The bikes often have no brakes, meaning that riders must use sheer leg strength to force deceleration.) Squid's brother James, a powerful-looking rider on a fixed-gear mountain bike and the favorite to win, took off his monster mask. The riders crowded to the starting line, waited for the signal, and broke into traffic in a pack.

Within a minute they had diffused, separating by skill, speed, and choice of route through the checkpoints. They looked the same as when on the job, each bombing through the city with a bag slung over one shoulder.

MESSENGER races have sprung up all over the world, ranging from informal after-work events to highly organized world championships. Last September, San Francisco hosted the fourth annual Cycle Messenger World Championships, following ones in Berlin, London, and Toronto; next month the fifth world championships will be held in Barcelona. In San Francisco some 600 bicycle messengers from North America, Europe, and Asia competed on fixed-gear bikes (revered among messengers), on bikes with large, heavy boxes in baskets, and on cargo bikes. They also raced in straight sprints—comparable to the 100-meter dash in track—and in something called the Trials, in which riders must hop over large rocks, cement walls, and other "extreme" obstacles. In the main event riders followed a grueling course up and down the city's hills, picking up and delivering packages in a race designed to simulate a messenger's rounds.

The highly stylized world championships evolved from street races like the New York contest. These grassroots competitions, called alleycat races, more accurately reflect the profession that inspired them. Almost every city with a messenger community has some form of alleycat race. No one seems to know who had the first, but the first group to meet regularly was probably the Toronto Alley Cats, founded almost ten years ago and still led by John Englar—known to all as Johnny Jet Fuel, after his Jet Fuel Coffee Shop. In the mid-1980s Englar and his friends—messengers or ex-messengers like him—would take to their bikes for late-night rambles through Toronto. "The whole idea," Englar explained to me recently, "was to ride through the downtown urban environment and architecture, experience the city for what it was, catch air, and mash our bikes up." In 1987 Englar turned the rides into an organized event. "We make [entrants] ride through parking garages, cross through buildings, up and down stairs," Englar said. "It's at least an hour full tilt in traffic. The whole idea is, Yes, you could get taken out."

BICYCLE messengers have existed for a hundred years in San Francisco and New York. They became cults of cool in the 1980s, when the number of messengers in New York reached a peak of around 5,000. E-mail and fax machines have attenuated their ranks (there are currently 1,000 to 2,000 New York messengers), but this has only added to the mystique. In an age when information travels around the world in a millisecond, these urban warriors still zip through the city on their own legpower to deliver legal documents, plane tickets, and other nondigital valuables.

Why bicycle messengers gather with such pride has little to do with the quantifiable rewards of their job. In the United States they work on a commission basis, which makes for long, hard days of riding; stopping to rest means loss of income. The best ones might earn $500 a week; messengers have no paid vacation, and most courier companies don't offer health or accident insurance. Riders must buy their own courier licenses in those cities (Boston, for example) where they are required, and must pay their own traffic fines.

What many messengers share, besides poor working conditions, is scorn for the constraints of professional careers and a joyous enthusiasm for bicycles as urban transportation. Anyone who has sped on a bicycle past a five-block-long backup of rush-hour traffic understands this zeal. But trying to beat the clock while racing through traffic can be suicidal. A number of couriers die on the job—last year at least five in Manhattan alone. After the awards ceremony at the San Francisco world championships racers took a slow memorial ride in honor of their fallen comrades, throwing an old bike into the harbor near Pier 54 to commemorate their dead.

"Everyone gets hit," Adam Ford told me recently, washing down spring rolls with a beer after work one evening at The DeLux Cafe, in Boston's South End. Ford was easy to recognize when he came in: red hair in a ponytail, as he had said on the phone, all-black full-body Pearl Izumi Lycra racing outfit, sleek metallic-gray helmet with black visor, and messenger bag with a pager and a two-way radio strapped to it. The DeLux Cafe is one of two main bicycle-messenger hangouts in Boston; its owner sponsored Ford and other Bostonians at the San Francisco world championships. As we talked, several other messengers joined us, unburdening themselves of their copious paraphernalia. Ford looked like a racer, as befits the tenth-place finisher (and top American) in the 1995 world championships in Toronto. His colleagues exem-

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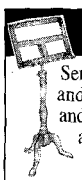

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plified the other courier look: studiously unkempt, in careful antagonism to the fashions of the careers they had forgone.

Although couriers spend their days delivering the packages that keep corporate America running, they share a distrust of authority and a disdain for the pallid indoor worker. Ford, who is twenty-six, graduated from Wesleyan University with a dual degree in studio arts and premed. Like a number of messengers I have talked to, he was thoughtful and articulate, despite the "dude"s and "like"s peppering his speech. His goatee twitched and his tongue studs flashed as he spoke in a machine-gun rhythm. "I was thinking about medical school, but this is just so much more entertaining. Why would I want to forfeit my youth to go to medical school?"

For messengers the job becomes a sport in itself—a race to deliver as many packages as possible in the shortest time. Ford, who races mountain bikes on weekends, is known as one of the fastest messengers in Boston. A fellow courier at The DeLux Cafe was astonished when he saw Ford's delivery log: fifty packages on a bad day, more than seventy on a good one. Most messengers would consider fifty to be a banner day.

Alleycat races are the truest gauge of a messenger's skill, and they also demonstrate the spontaneity, recklessness, and extremism so valued in the messenger community. The world championships ought to be as capricious, disconcerting to motorists, and, above all, dangerous. But organization has its price: the world championships are sanctioned and safe. Achim Beier, the proprietor of the company Messenger Berlin, was criticized for organizing the Berlin world championships too well. "There is always a contradiction between professional organization and the character of messengers," he told me recently. "Some messengers think money is suspicious, and they don't want to be dependent on sponsors. But to have these big races you need money." The difference in attitude between Europe and North America was evident at the 1995 and 1996 world championships. The Toronto and San Francisco events, in contrast to the one in Berlin, were as much festivals celebrating an alternative lifestyle as athletic competitions. "The Americans," Beier said, sighing, "love it more the freaky style."

Adam Ford told me, "Kids don't do a lot of training. To go out of your way and make sacrifices goes against the spirit of a courier race." Still, in San Francisco, despite the party atmosphere (and predictable appearances by naked riders), the course was a tortuous run through Telegraph Hill, North Beach, and the Financial District. Racers received higher scores for carrying packages longer distances or across greater changes in elevation; bulky and heavy packages were also worth extra points. As much as the San Francisco committee tried to simulate common challenges to couriers, though, one crucial factor was inevitably absent: traffic. The scale of the world championships requires closed streets, thus obviating a messenger's most prized skill—the ability to negotiate traffic at top speed. As one San Francisco competitor told a reporter, "If they really wanted to make the race authentic, they'd have us run through traffic while people opened car doors."

I REMEMBERED his words as I rode my rickety rented ten-speed through Manhattan last Halloween, trying to catch racers at a few of the checkpoints. As I approached the Williamsburg Bridge, one rider shot down the ramp past me and turned into oncoming traffic at full speed, finding an opening between two cars where there was none.

As the racers would have to, I climbed the stairs to the bridge and rode out to the checkpoint, a quarter of the way across. One by one racers appeared, slaloming between workers walking home to Brooklyn, negotiating hazardous crevices, bumps, and narrow passages, spinning and stopping on a dime as they pulled out their manifest sheets to be signed.

I rode to the finish line, in a vacant lot at 20th Street and the East River, where riders, organizers, and friends drank and relaxed. Even in this crowd, where presumably no outfit would be out of place, I managed to be a misfit pedaling up on my Sunday-rider's bike in blue jeans, windbreaker, and rented bulbous pink helmet. The further the messengers drifted into party mode, the less approachable they became to an outsider. Few would divulge their last names, fewer still their employers—some companies, I was told, are unlicensed and uninsured.

Chris Schmidt, who came in second

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(after placing fifteenth in San Francisco), was an affable exception. He held up a bleeding hand and explained, "One car stopped for pedestrians in the middle of the street, right in front of me. I cut my knuckle but I didn't fall off my bike." John Yacobellis, the winner, found a way to avoid pedestrians altogether. After covering the uptown checkpoints he "caught a ride" partway down the West Side Highway, grabbing a car's window frame, bumper, or wheel well and riding like a remora on a shark.

This wasn't cheating: in alleycat races anything goes. The same applies on the job, of course; a client cares little how the package travels, as long as it reaches its destination fast. In most cities "towing" is not very helpful, since bikes are usually faster than cars in downtown traffic. But in New York, where long straight stretches are common, towing is a valued skill. James, Squid's brother, was the odds-on favorite before the New York race in part because of his fabled towing expertise and daring. "He just lays his hand on a side window," one rider said admiringly, "and lets the friction pull him along." James added to his legend one year in San Francisco when he took part in the annual Russian River Ride, an eighty-mile messenger pilgrimage from the city out to rural Sonoma County. James rode for miles on a tow at about 35 mph on a fixed-gear bike with no brakes, his legs "going like a blender" the entire time, according to one witness, as they kept pace with the pedals.

Derring-do wasn't enough for James last Halloween: he skipped one of the checkpoints and was disqualified. He didn't seem to mind, though, as he lingered with his colleagues on the rocks by the water, watching the late-afternoon sunlight recede across Brooklyn. Squid, surveying the scene, explained, "It's competitive, but it's also a bonding thing. You're racing people, but you're also racing against the city."

That race is no contest. From my vantage point on the Williamsburg Bridge, I'd had a view of planes and helicopters over the river, the J train crossing the bridge, and thousands of cars stuck on the FDR expressway. None offered a more efficient way than the cyclists' of traversing Manhattan. The early finishers in the race covered about 300 blocks, or fifteen miles, in rush-hour traffic, stopping for six checkpoints, in less than an hour.

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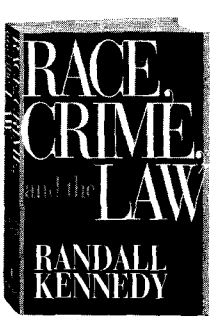

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Thomas Pynchon's powerfully symbolic language gets us beneath the rhetoric of our pretensions

by Rick Moody

MASON & DIXON

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THE novelist Robert Coover, speaking of influences in American fiction, once remarked that apprentices of his generation found themselves (in the 1950s) grappling with two very different models of what the novel might be. One, Coover said, was Saul Bellow's realistic if picaresque *Adventures of Augie March*; the other was William Gaddis's encyclopedic *Recognitions*. Writers my age (mid-thirties), however, don't have the luxury of a choice. Our problem is how to confront the influence of a single novelist: Thomas Pynchon.

Despite the reputation of Pynchon's magnum opus, *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), many of my contemporaries came to him through his earlier work. His first novel, *V.* (1963), is mostly concerned with the search by one Herbert Stencil for a woman—or place, or concept—referred to in his father's journals simply by this initial. The action of the novel—which also takes up Stencil's father, a network of European spies, and a Whole Sick Crew of American Navy wastrels—goes as far afield as turn-of-the-century Egypt, southwest Africa during the First World War, and Malta after the Second World War, dealing along the way with contemporary Americana up and down the Eastern Seaboard. *V.* is ripe with the kind of dense, symbolic imagery we associate with poets—with T. S. Eliot and Wallace Stevens (*Gravity's Rainbow* likewise caroms off Rilke and Dickinson)—and with the loose, improvisatory language of beat writing. It is by turns hilarious, slow, and utterly mesmerizing.

Illustrations by Stephen Alcorn

Portions of V. cannibalize the author's student work, particularly the two stories "Low-lands" and "Under the Rose." (Pynchon's later novel Vineland, published in 1990, opens dramatically—with a character leaping through a storefront window—in an image lifted from V.: "Here [was] one potential berserk studying the best technique for jumping through a plate glass window.") Repetitions haunt the entire oeuvre, so much so that Pynchon's work seems to exhibit a sort of "conceptual continuity," as the composer Frank Zappa named it, where-

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in each work builds on thematic and formal innovations—and even the raw material—of prior efforts.

Another example: *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), Pynchon's masterpiece in miniature, like *V.* takes as its form a search. In *Lot 49* the quester is a woman with the unlikely name of Oedipa Maas, who, engaged as executrix for the estate of Pierce Inverarity, a Hearstlike tycoon, inadvertently begins to uncover an international postal conspiracy dating back to Europe in the Middle Ages. Like *V.*, Oedipa's story is rich with symbolism and leitmotif, in an armature often having to do with an idea practically trademarked by Pynchon: entropy, or the tendency of closed energy systems to move toward disorder. Again this is a borrowing from an early story by the author ("Entropy"); and it is reprised, in *Gravity's Rainbow*.

Whereas Pynchon's early novels are accessible, or at least crystalline enough to permit readers to follow them to their ambiguous conclusions, *Gravity's Rainbow* confounds readerly expectations utterly. The surrealism—the eruptions of odd, unforeseeable events and voices; the doublings, triplings, halvings, and quarterings of characters; the chance procedures—that occasionally colors prior novels emerges in *GR* as the dominant strategy. Pynchon's controlled third-person-limited point of view in *Lot 49* becomes the fractal omniscience of *GR*. Primarily the narrative of Tyrone Slothrop, a GI in London during the Second World War who has the ability to predict imminent German bombing trajectories by erection, *GR* deals tangentially with hundreds of other important characters, with Russians, Germans, Africans, and Central Asians, and with settings such as Colonial America, turn-of-the-century Africa, and the United States of the early seventies before it dispatches Slothrop entirely, casting his fragmentary consciousness around the remainder of the book. (He fails to appear recognizably in the last fifty pages.)

What accounts for the perpetual hold *Gravity's Rainbow* has on the consciousness of American writers and critics? What accounts for the myth that has sprung up around it—a myth that seems to have ensnared even the facts of the author's life, or, at least, our idea of those facts? What makes *GR* so crucial to the voyage of younger American writers? I'd contend that it's Pynchon's style, not his subject. Whereas the prose in *V.*, *Lot 49*, and the early stories is occasionally inventive and arrestingly lyrical ("For it was now like walking among matrices of a great digital computer, the zeroes and ones twinned above, hanging like balanced mobiles right and left, ahead, thick, maybe endless. Behind the hieroglyphic streets there would either be a transcendent meaning, or only the earth"), in *GR* it is more than dazzling—it's uncanny. It discards the usual limits on English and American prose. In fact, the writing—notwithstanding the physics and hard science in a novel often fascinated with the intricacies of ordnance technologies—seems to me the point of *GR*, its motivating force, especially as this language elucidates Pynchon's febrile imagination. Take, for example, the stunning opening page, with its nightmarish evocation of the London Blitz.

> They have begun to move. They pass in line, out of the main station, out of downtown, and begin pushing into older and more desolate parts of the city. Is this the way out? Faces turn to the windows, but no one dares ask, not out loud. Rain comes down. No, this is not a disentanglement from, but a progressive *knotting into*—they go in under archways, secret entrances of rotted concrete that only looked like loops of an underpass . . . and it is poorer the deeper they go . . . ruinous secret cities of poor, places whose *names he has never heard.*

American research libraries swell with monographs interpreting *Gravity's Rainbow*, and many of these monographs are taken up with the arcana of the novel—the physics, the statistics, the theory, the citations (of Max Weber, of Gioacchino Rossini, of Pavlov). But if *GR* were merely literature of ideas (in the limited sense that Nabokov so often decried), we would think no more of this work than we do of Philip K. Dick's engaging science fictions. Pynchon's accomplishment is that he has found the perfect marriage of form and language for his rendering of Western consciousness.

The Reagan-Bush years saw Pynchon's output dwindle. Other than the introduction to his volume of apprentice stories, *Slow Learner* (1984), Pynchon published nothing new during the eighties.

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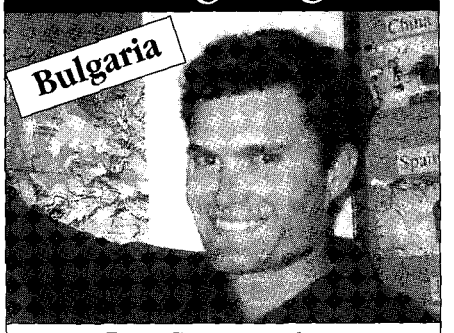

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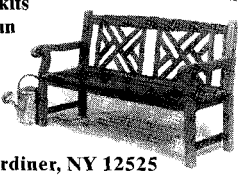

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However, his next novel, *Vineland*, an anti-canonical comic romp, is set during that time of substance abuse and leveraged buyouts. Largely dismissed by tenured Pynchonians when it was first published, *Vineland* now seems to have been underrated. Its narrative—of the California student movements in the sixties, and of Frenesi Gates, a student filmmaker turned FBI informant and delinquent hippie mom—is both funny ("The secret to Spinach Casserole was the UBI, or Universal Binding Ingredient, cream of mushroom soup") and sympathetic in ways that are rare in the Pynchon canon. Its language, rather than its science and philosophy, is uppermost in the mind of the reader (though there are of course passages of Pynchonian erudition, as in the material on union organizing during the thirties), and this language is controlled—without the occasional awkwardnesses of the early work—and engaging.

WHICH brings us to *Mason & Dixon*. If you accept the rumor-mongering on the World Wide Web and elsewhere, the author has been at work on this particular monster for more than a decade. This is easy to believe. At nearly 800 pages, *Mason & Dixon* is obviously meant to quash the idea that *Gravity's Rainbow* was some sort of fantastic lucky break. It is self-consciously intent on dealing with American literature on the most ambitious scale imaginable. And it succeeds magnificently.

The first electrifying difference about *M&D* is the astonishing voice of its narration. Pynchon has elected to write his new novel in an eighteenth-century English idiom. To say this is risky is to understate, and yet the voice here is not only elegiac and credible but also powerfully moving and unexpected, especially given the very contemporary language of the Pynchon novels that have preceded it.

Eighteenth-century prose is the style because this is a historical novel about the famous surveyors Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon—mappers of the border between Pennsylvania and Maryland that also made up part of the dividing line between slave states and free states before the Civil War, and globetrotters on a variety of scientific adventures in the later 1700s. More than simply a period voice telling a tall tale of these two anti-heroes, however, the narration is largely the first-person voice of a singular character, the Reverend Wicks Cherrycoke, who tells most of the story of *M&D* after dinner, for the entertainment of his family. Thus we have an oral narrative, like Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*—the first such in Pynchon's output, and a form that recalls an earlier time in the development of the novel. (As far as conceptual continuity is concerned, the Reverend Cherrycoke seems to be related to a minor character from *GR*, a psychic called Ronald Cherrycoke—and this perhaps accounts for the Reverend's ability to relate events at which he was not present.)

The action of *Mason & Dixon* is refreshingly linear, compared with the complexity of Pynchon's earlier work. Since it's shaped by the needs of Cherrycoke's folktale (he was a member of two Mason and Dixon expeditions and bases his yarn on inside knowledge), it provides many of the elements of a good story: romance, Indian attack, and so forth. The tale opens with Mason and Dixon meeting in about 1760 to embark, at the behest of the British Royal Society, on a journey to the Southern Hemisphere to observe the Transit of Venus—the passage of that planet across the sun. Just as they set sail from England, however, they are attacked by a French frigate and several of the crew members are killed. This episode, which comes only thirty pages into the book, sets the tone for the story to follow—Action! Incident! Naval battle! I want to be clear on this point: *Mason & Dixon* is a page-turner.

After beseeching the Royal Society to allow them to abandon their sea passage (the society responds by threatening them with legal action), the pair proceed to Cape Town, South Africa, to observe the Transit, in a portion of the book's opening section ("Latitudes and Departures") that is luminously rendered, replete with the slave culture of the Dutch colonies in South Africa and liaisons between the astronomers—Dixon, whose sunny romantic nature is in stark contrast to the gothic-melancholic Mason, is elsewhere more often the culprit, but here Mason gets into the act—and various women of the Cape. After the Transit, Mason sails for St. Helena, in the south Atlantic, to take further observations with a Royal Society chronometer. "Latitudes and Departures" winds down with Mason and Dixon back in England, in disquisition mainly upon family history and British calendar reform.

In accepting a commission to survey the border between Pennsylvania and Maryland, Mason, the expedition's leader, retreats from the hard science of the Transit of Venus (a retreat made more poignant by his failure to be elected to the Royal Society), and the book returns to the virtuosic patch of analytic and geophysical writing that colors the first 250 pages (though an abundance of detail and arcana remains for hard-core Pynchon decoders), such that the section called "America" begins to indulge in the metaphysical, moral, and political struggles of the New World. For example, Mason and Dixon land first in Philadelphia, and Benjamin Franklin is among their initial acquaintances: "The Geometers have encounter'd the eminent Philadelphian quite by chance, in the pungent and dim back reaches of an Apothecary in Locust-Street" (wherein Dixon is about to buy a wagonload of laudanum for their journey). Franklin is of course given to quips: "'Strangers, heed my wise advice,—Never pay the Retail Price.'" Not long after, George Washington is their host in Virginia: "If the Colonel serves not as a Focus of Sobriety, neither is he quite the incompetent Fool depicted in the London press."

PYNCHON'S preoccupation with conspiracy is well documented. It haunts all the books, from *Lot 49*, with its postal conspiracy, to *Vineland*, with its FBI infiltration of the student movement, and it gets ample play in *Mason & Dixon* as well. Initially, during the Transit of Venus expedition, the conspiracy resides in the East India Company, in whose pocket (by relation) Mason finds Nevil Maskelyne, the future Astronomer Royal, who perhaps thwarts Mason's election to the Royal Society. On the shores of America the surveyors find a sinister new force at work: the Jesuits. Yep, the Society of Jesus, which invented its own "Telegraph," tried to wipe out the Chinese practice of fêng shui, founded a libertine community of nuns in Quebec called the Widows of Christ, and bankrolled a group of "Jesuits on horseback, in black riding-Habits with divided Skirts," who patrol the streets of Canada reinforcing doctrine, decorated in their fiendish insignia: an upside-down five-pointed star.

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Against this backdrop of conspiracies political and religious, Mason and Dixon retreat into the wilderness, into a kind of folkloric and parabolic warp, among a coterie of axmen and Indian guides and Presbyterian assistants. They move first south and then west, surveying the boundary line and its tangents, and as they go, the Enlightenment replaces the Gothic and Renaissance wisdom of Western culture, with Mason and Dixon moving in and through and around the Enlightenment's articulations. As Cherrycoke puts it,

> As God has receded, as Deism has crept in to make the best of this progressive Absence, more and more do we witness extreme varieties of human character emergent . . . Illuminati, Freemasons, Elect Cohens, many of whom, to my great curiosity, have found their way into Pennsylvania.

This is the America that Mason and Dixon voyage into, and it is where they encounter, among others, the Redzingerites, whose "view of Baptism does not, need I say, stop at Total Immersion"; and, during winter layovers in New York, the Sons of Liberty, bent on overthrowing the British oppressors; and the Sadean inhabitants of Lepton Castle; and Professor Voam and his pet electric eel; and Armand Allègre, France's greatest living chef, who has come to the Colonies to try to escape the amorous attentions of a "mechanickal Duck" created by the immortal French scientist Jacques de Vaucanson; and Zepho Beck, who metamorphoses during the full moon into a giant beaver; and Captain Zhang, a fêng shui master and refugee from the Jesuit conspiracy; and perpetrators of Indian massacre (in Lancaster, Pennsylvania) and rebellion and backwoods barbarism. Along the way there is of course the work to do, in which chain lengths are extended, sometimes through the middle of properties, on one occasion right through a house (with the inhabitants arguing over which state to reside in), and trees are felled, and a broad swath of civilized clearing is extended into the pristine continent.

If the action sounds picaresque, that's because it is. The 450 middle pages of *Mason & Dixon* most resemble the great picaresque novels of Fielding or the metaphysical comedy of Voltaire's *Candide*. What makes *M&D* modern (besides un-

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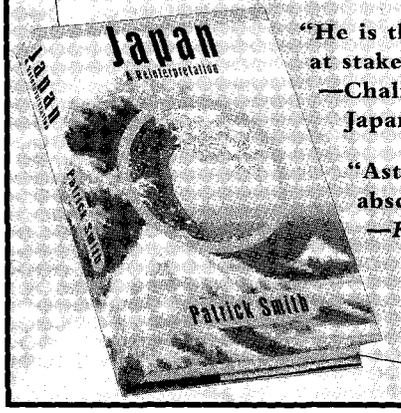

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canny similarities between the Enlightenment and the millennium, besides sly references to contemporary culture—to dope smoking, to popular music: "'Is it not the very Rhythm of the Engines, . . . the Rock of the Oceans, the Roll of the drums in the Night'") is the tremendous intellection spun into its episodic action: Charles Mason's ambition (which is matched only by Dixon's refusal to be ambitious at all, except in womanizing, drinking, and fishing) is to understand the invisible forces behind the physical laws that make up his work during the Enlightenment. Like *Vineland*, in which scarcely a character escapes without being described as a ghost, and like *GR*, with its cast of revenants, *Mason & Dixon* dwells frequently on what is hidden. At times this absence seems to refer to the astrophysics of the twentieth century ("'Time is the Space that may not be seen'")—out of reach for Mason and Dixon, and yet implied in their endeavors; at times it refers to the divine ("Surely, at the end of the day, we serve no master but Him that regulates the movements of the Heav'ns, which taken together form a cryptick Message," Mason says), and therefore to the degraded aspect of deism during the Enlightenment. At times what's hidden in *M&D* is the hibernating bear of Colonial politics ("Does Britannia, when she sleeps, dream? Is America her dream?—in which all that cannot pass in the metropolitan Wakefulness is allow'd Expression away in the restless Slumber of these Provinces, and on West-ward, wherever 'tis not yet mapp'd, nor written down, nor ever, by the majority of Mankind, seen"). Whatever the identity of this hidden force, it leaves its mark on the book, and on us, in an *M&D* refrain: "As above, so below."

Mason and Dixon complete their line in 1767, and spend much of the following year surveying a degree of latitude also contracted to them by the Royal Society. The novel provides two separate and completely opposed endings to this section of the book. In the first ending the surveyors are unable to cross the Native American Warrior Path, west of the Alleghenies (the path is patrolled by the violent Delaware and Shawnee tribes), and so turn back toward civilization. In the second (false) ending they continue for a while west, into the dusk, into the herds of buffalo, into the prairie, away from the civilization of the Enlightenment. This ending is an example of the kind of dream logic that overtakes the book in the wilderness (in this regard Cherrycoke frequently likens his tale to the works of the great Baron Munchausen); in truth the surveyors return to England after completing their assignment. Mason undertakes a second and final observation of the Transit of Venus in 1769 (the closing section of the book is called "Last Transit"), this time from northern Ireland, while Dixon makes observations from an island near the North Cape.

Toward the end the surveyors' remorse about the Mason-Dixon Line emerges: it was not a fitting monument to their careers, it was piecework for a corrupt organization (the Royal Society), it denuded a wilderness that should not have been denuded, it created a division between communities which would only come to cause harm. "Mason groans. 'Shall wise Doctors one day write History's assessment of the Good resulting from this Line, *vis-à-vis* the not-so-good? I wonder which List will be longer.'"

Then time runs out. Dixon's gout disables him. Mason's melancholy takes on a desperate and irremediable hue. The last thirty pages of *Mason & Dixon* concern the indefinite state of this twinned pair, of this fractious marriage, in twilight years. These pages are evocative and terribly sad. Mortality has often been Pynchon's theme. As *M&D* concludes with Mason's deluded insistence (after Dixon's death) upon taking his second wife and family back to America, it becomes clear that the novel's attention to the mechanisms and technologies of time and space finds its most poignant articulation in the simple inevitability of death and decay. Pynchon seems to have learned even more about these subjects as he has gotten older. It's hard not to read of Mason's passing, and of his son's rhapsodic but sadly ironic depiction of an American continent in which "the Fish jump into your Arms," without being both moved and remorseful about the dwindling promise of our American enterprise—which dwindling, in *Mason & Dixon*, begins at the outset of the forcible colonization of our continent, at the very moment we survey this land.

This is just the kind of truth that we often encounter in Pynchon: not simply what it means, finally, to be American—kith and kin of slaveholders and abolitionists, racists and liberals, the powerful and the powerless, the dispossessed and the rapacious, the oppressed and the oppressors—but that the boundary lines that have been surveyed to separate our American dichotomies, the boundaries of rhetoric and philosophy, are arbitrary, tentative, unwritten in human nature. Pynchon's chthonic, powerfully symbolic language in *M&D* gets us beneath the rhetoric of our pretensions to the raw, unconsoling paradoxes of consciousness—with all fancies and hallucinations and regrets intact. And that's why artists as diverse as William Gibson, Don DeLillo, Laurie Anderson, Steve Erickson, David Foster Wallace, James Cameron, Jonathan Franzen, and Salman Rushdie seem to have schooled themselves in the Pynchon academy of myth and language. With *Mason & Dixon* we're again in the generous hands of one of American literature's true masters.

Chekhov in American

by Adam Kirsch

THE PLAYS OF ANTON CHEKHOV

translated by Paul Schmidt.
HarperCollins,
387 pages, $30.00.

In the English-speaking world Anton Chekhov is far better known for his plays than for his short stories. But during his lifetime Chekhov's stories made his reputation; his plays were given a more ambivalent reception, even by his fellow writers. Shortly after Chekhov's death, in 1904, Tolstoy voiced a common feeling that plays like *Uncle Vanya* and *Three Sisters* weren't quite dramas. "To evoke a mood," he said in an interview, "you want a lyrical poem. Dramatic forms serve, and ought to serve, quite different aims. In a dramatic work the author ought to deal with some problem that has yet to be solved and every char-

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acter in the play ought to solve it according to the idiosyncrasies of his own character. . . . But you won't find anything of the kind in Chekhov."

In this criticism Tolstoy hit on exactly those features that have made Chekhov's plays the fundamental works of modern drama. Like lyric poems, they favor mood over plot; there is no overriding "problem," and when problems do appear, the playwright never seems to endorse any solutions. Chekhov's dramatic form allowed him to present things on the stage "just as complicated and just as simple as . . . in real life," as he famously wrote. "People are sitting at a table having dinner, that's all, but at the same time their happiness is being created, or their lives are being torn apart."

But Chekhov's emphasis on tone and mood, and his faithful re-creation of ordinary conversation with all its hesitations, references, and silences, make him an unusually difficult playwright to translate. Just as difficult to convey is the class dynamic that Chekhov treated again and again: there is no precise English, much less American, equivalent of his gentry, trying to live a city life on income from vast, ungovernable, debt-ridden estates. To an audience that doesn't share Chekhov's basic cultural knowledge, his plays can seem far more meandering, depressing, and vague than they were intended to be.

In his new translation of Chekhov's complete plays Paul Schmidt has these problems very much in mind. Both an actor and a Russian scholar, Schmidt sets out to give us a Chekhov who makes sense. He writes in his introduction, "Above all, I hope these translations will provide actors and directors with a clear sense of how the plays are meant to work and how they should sound." His guiding stars are clarity and relevance—particularly relevance to an American audience. "I want to emphasize," he writes, "that this is an American translation, not simply another 'English' translation."

The result is a surprisingly lively Chekhov, colloquial and clear, which will come as a revelation to those who know the playwright through the widely read but rather stiff British translations of Constance Garnett and Elisaveta Fen. Everything about Schmidt's book, from the organization and footnotes to the language itself, is meant to clear away the obscurity and sentimentality with which Chekhov is often burdened. The plays that emerge are funnier and more muscular than one might have expected.

Among the simplest but most effective of Schmidt's choices is to include all of Chekhov's mature finished plays. Most editions of Chekhov include only the "major plays"—*The Seagull*, *Uncle Vanya*, *Three Sisters*, and *The Cherry Orchard*—and these are, of course, the heart of his achievement. But from those four plays one would never know that the young Chekhov started out as a writer of comic stories for humor magazines, and that his first successes for the stage were one-act farces. He continued to write these short comedies throughout his career, and they show him to be a master of comic timing. Most of them have faded with age, but *The Bear*—in which a blustering bully challenges a woman to a duel and then falls in love with her when she agrees to fight—could still raise laughs today. Seeing these farces (there are seven of them in the volume) alongside the later plays changes how we see Chekhov, and makes us more responsive to the comic elements in a play like *The Cherry Orchard*.

Even more illuminating are Schmidt's notes, which manage to demystify the many quotations and references scattered throughout the plays. Whenever a character hums a tune or recites a verse, Schmidt tells us just what it is he's saying, and what associations it would have for a Russian audience. This basic information, which most translations fail to provide, does away with half the vagueness that audiences often find in Chekhov. For example, in the first act of *Three Sisters*, Masha, the middle sister, repeats a snatch of poetry from Pushkin. To an English-speaker the verse sounds highly romantic, like something from Yeats: "Beside the sea there stands a tree, and on that tree a golden chain." This creates an atmosphere of sad longing—very "Chekhovian." But for a Russian audience, Schmidt reveals, the reference would have immediately called up the next lines, which he takes the liberty of including in his translation: "And on that chain an educated cat goes around and around and around." This effectively punctures the dreamy tone, leaving us instead with a fanciful, even

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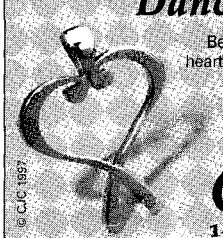
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silly, fairy tale; the emphasis now is not so much on the "golden chain" as on the "going around and around," which mirrors Masha's sense of frustration. This is a perfect instance of how even a literally correct translation can give a misleading impression of Chekhov.

BUT the most striking element in Schmidt's "American" translation is his attempt to put Chekhov's Russian into modern American idiom. There's no doubt that we sorely need such a translation; even the most casual dialogue can sound faintly absurd in the starchy British English of many popular editions of Chekhov. Take, for instance, this exchange from Act I of *Ivanov* in Elisaveta Fen's Penguin translation.

> Anna Petrovna: Who was it talking here just now? Was it you, Misha? Why are you stamping about like that?
>
> Borkin: Anyone who had to deal with your *cher Nicolàs* would stamp about!
>
> Anna Petrovna: I say, Misha, will you have some hay brought to the croquet lawn?
>
> Borkin: Leave me alone, please.
>
> Anna Petrovna: Tut-tut, what a tone of voice!

Schmidt turns this passage into something American actors can plausibly say onstage.

> Anna: What's going on out there? Is that you, Misha? What are you marching around like that for?
>
> Borkin: Trying to talk sense into your friend Nicholas here. Voilà. Enough to make anybody start marching.
>
> Anna: Misha, I want some hay brought up to the croquet lawn; don't forget to tell them.
>
> Borkin: Oh, leave me alone, will you?
>
> Anna: How rude! Will you please not take that tone with me?

At times, however, Schmidt's effort to make Chekhov sound more American leads him to word choices that a sensitive ear may find anachronistic. The risks in his approach are most evident in *The Cherry Orchard*, in which Lopakhin, the son of a serf, ends up buying the Ranevsky estate, to which his family once belonged. Class is the crucial element in the play; it's vital to recognize that Lopakhin is a peasant, on a level altogether different from the aristocratic Ranevskys. But Schmidt persistently refuses to use the word "peasant" in describing him. Take, for example, Lopakhin's speech in Act I, which establishes his love-hate relationship with Lyubov Andreyevna, the mistress of the estate. As Ann Dunnigan translates it, in the Signet paperback edition, the class implications are clear.

> Lyubov Andreyevna . . . led me to the washstand in this very room, the nursery. "Don't cry, little peasant," she said, "it will heal in time for your wedding. . . ." Little peasant . . . my father was a peasant, it's true, and here I am in a white waistcoat and tan shoes. . . . I may be rich, I've made a lot of money, but if you think about it, analyze it, I'm a peasant through and through.

Schmidt prefers a far less suggestive term for Lopakhin:

> "Don't cry, poor boy; you'll live long enough to get married." Poor boy . . . Well, my father was poor, but take a look at me now, all dressed up, brand-new suit and tan shoes. . . . I'm rich now, got lots of money, but when you think about it, I guess I'm still a poor boy from the country.

"Poor boy from the country" does not carry nearly the same emotional weight as "peasant." Elsewhere Schmidt has Lopakhin calling himself a "dirt farmer," which has still different connotations. What Schmidt gains in Americanness here, he loses in psychological accuracy. And such word choices abound: "literacy programs" for "reading rooms," "homeless man" for "tramp," "freak" for "crank." These words are so contemporary that they call attention to the translation, distracting us from the play itself.

Still, when translating Chekhov, too contemporary is better than too literary. Even when a word or phrase sticks out, Schmidt's language is vigorous and comprehensible; reading it, we feel that these characters are not just beautiful, sad souls but real people. For a playwright as frequently misunderstood as Chekhov, this is perhaps the greatest service that any translator could have performed. A generation from now Schmidt's American English may sound as antiquated as Elisaveta Fen's British English, but until then Schmidt's Chekhov should be the first choice for any American reader. ❦

BRIEF REVIEWS

In Search of Planet Vulcan

by Richard Baum and William Sheehan. Plenum, 310 pages, $28.95.

Readers unversed in astronomy should not be put off by the technical terms that necessarily flourish in this account of scientific wild-goose chasing, for they do not in the least obscure a fine tale full of eccentric characters and odd coincidences. The hypothetical planet Vulcan, lying between Mercury and the Sun, is the only possible means of accounting for Mercury's peculiar orbit under the Newtonian system, and such a planet could, presumably, best be detected during a total eclipse. Years of futile study, professional rivalry, alleged sightings, and acrimonious debate preceded the eclipse of July 29, 1878, when the Moon's shadow would "arc across the vast western United States" from Yellowstone to the Gulf of Mexico. Every astronomer worth his telescope was posted in a hole or on a height along that line. Even Thomas Edison was there, en-

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sconced in a chicken coop to keep the pervasive dust from deranging the invention that he hoped would measure the temperature of the Sun's corona. It did. The astronomers were less fortunate. Vulcan remained invisible except to James Craig Watson, of Ann Arbor (an impassioned Vulcanite), and one dubiously reliable amateur. The affair produced a thundering row and language unsuited to the dignity of science, for it put a spanner in the works of Newton's clockwork universe. Mr. Baum and Mr. Sheehan tell the complicated story very well indeed, providing sharp background detail and a certain amount of deadpan humor. They reveal a world unknown except to stargazers.

Apocryphal Tales

by Karel Capek,
translated by Norma Comrada.
Catbird Press, 192 pages,
$13.95.

Mr. Capek's "fables and would-be tales" are suavely savage satires on political practices and human characters—the characters being historical or mythical worthies (Pilate, Don Juan), the political practices universally recognizable. The pieces are individually clever and thoughtful, and should be absorbed in small doses. Taken all at once, the bitter flavor becomes monotonous.

The White Tecumseh

by Stanley P. Hirshson.
Wiley, 496 pages,
$30.00.

Professor Hirshson believes that William Tecumseh Sherman's greatest talent as a military commander was his ability to move troops over long distances while keeping control of a dangerously extended supply line. This opinion has not prevented the author from creating a lively biography of a man who becomes steadily more interesting as his story unfolds. Sherman was no stolid war machine. He was subject to fits of paranoia and spasms of unjustified optimism. He was usually right, but his mistakes were doozies. He wrote acidly amusing letters to his family (a large and politically influential clan), who responded in kind, and quotations from Sherman's private correspondence give the text an unmilitary sparkle. So

You deserve a factual look at...

Those "West Bank" Settlements

Are they *really* the "greatest obstacle to peace?"

In the context of the negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians that have now been going on for almost three years, it is often asserted that the Israeli towns and villages (usually and with some derogation referred to as "settlements") in Judea/Samaria (the "West Bank") are possibly the most serious obstacle to peace. That has been and is being repeated so often that many have come to accept it as truth.

What are the facts?

A recap of history. Some thumbnail history may be in order. Large numbers of Jews have been living in these territories since biblical times. Most of the Arabs living there are in fact relative newcomers. "Palestine" is the entire area now covered by Israel including Judea/Samaria (the so-called "West Bank") and what is now the Kingdom of Jordan. It originally also included the Golan Heights, which later, in an agreement between England and France, were ceded to France, and to Syria as the successor in possession. In 1922, contrary to the Mandate of the League of Nations, the British severed the entire area east of the Jordan and gave it to the Hashemite Arabs for their assistance in World War I. Thus, fully 75% of Palestine, all of which under the Mandate and under the terms of the Balfour Declaration was meant to be a home for the Jewish people, was lost for that purpose. Only the area west of the Jordan River was left for the Jewish settlement.

"Why should the Arab countries and the 'West Bank' be the only places in the world where Jews are not allowed to live?"

How the West Bank became "Arab country." In 1947, after decades of strife between Arabs and Jews, the British decided to relinquish the Mandate. The UN stepped in and proposed a partition plan under which the country (west of the River) was to be divided into respective Arab and Jewish areas. Jerusalem was to be internationalized. The Jews accepted the plan; the Arabs refused it out of hand. In 1948, on the twice truncated territory allotted to them by the U.N., the Jews declared their independence and the state of Israel was born. On the same day, six Arab armies invaded the new-born state. In what can be described as an almost biblical miracle, the Jews defeated them. When an armistice was finally secured, however, TransJordan remained in possession of Judea/Samaria (the "West Bank") and the eastern part of Jerusalem; Egypt remained in possession of the Gaza Strip. TransJordan renamed itself Jordan.

The Six-Day War. Once in possession of the "West Bank" and East Jerusalem, the Jordanians promptly proceeded to expel all Jews and systematically to desecrate and to destroy most Jewish sacred places, cemeteries and houses of worship. No Jews, regardless of citizenship were allowed into the "West Bank" or East Jerusalem, the locale of the Western Wall, the holiest site in Judaism. In 1967, Egyptian president Abdel Nasser, joined by the same array of Arab armies that had unsuccessfully tried to destroy Israel at its birth in 1948, launched another war against Israel "to drive the Jews into the sea" and into oblivion, once and for all. But the Israelis utterly defeated the combined Arab might in the Six-Day War, one of the greatest military victories in history. When the dust of war settled, the Israelis had not only retained their national territory, but had repossessed the territories of Judea/Sumaria (the "West Bank"), the eastern part of Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip, the Golan Heights and had totally occupied Egypt's vast Sinai Peninsula.

It is clear from this abbreviated history that the Israeli claim to the "West Bank" is far stronger than that of the Arabs. About 200,000 Jews now live there. And why shouldn't they? Why should the Arab countries and the "West Bank" be the only places in the whole wide world where Jews are not allowed to live? How can 200,000 Jews living among one million Arabs be the "greatest threat to peace"? Why should anybody be concerned about a new settlement of a few mobile homes on some barren Judean hills as the "greatest threat to peace," when we seem to be oblivious and totally unconcerned about the unrelenting hostility of the Arab countries, the de facto incorporation of Lebanon by Syria, the Scuds and the chemical weapons still remaining in Iraq, and the relentless and ominous build-up of Syria's missile forces?

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do peripheral episodes culled from contemporary memoirs. During a truce Colonel Samuel Lockett, the chief engineer of the Vicksburg defenses, went snooping to observe the Union formation. He was collected by Sherman, who gave him letters from Northerners with friends in the besieged city. "The general then invited Lockett to sit with him on a nearby log, where each praised the engineering work of the opposing army." Lockett was so captivated by the conversation that he forgot what he had come there to do. Battles and campaigns are, of course, well and thoroughly described, but the accompanying maps are too small to be of much use.

The New Life

by Orhan Pamuk, translated by Güneli Gün. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 296 pages, $24.00.

Mr. Pamuk's witty, elegant novel opens with an epigraph from Novalis: "The others experienced nothing like it even though they heard the same tales." This is a warning. Every reader is invited to make his own experience out of an ironic, fantastic tale of picaresque wanderings by bus around Turkey. There are elements of the macabre, the burlesque, the nostalgic, and the lyrical, and underlying them all is the implication that spiritual values are incompatible with the secular society created by Atatürk, whose image is as ubiquitous as Big Brother's. There is also the implication that spiritual values are a delusion of youth. However one chooses to see this teasing, multifaceted work, it provides stimulating reading.

The Bacon Fancier

by Alan Isler. Viking, 214 pages, $21.95.

Mr. Isler's four stories are set in Renaissance Venice, in late-eighteenth-century England, aboard a Victorian ocean liner, and in modern New York. They all concern Jews who wish simply to get on peacefully in a gentile world, and who on the whole succeed, but not without encountering prejudice, interference, and female goyim. The stories are slyly amusing, shrewd in social understanding and period detail, and rich in literary reference. They are a pleasure to read.

The Names of Things

by Susan Brind Morrow. Riverhead, 288 pages, $25.95.

The author's great-grandfather allegedly "knew seven dead languages," so Ms. Morrow's love of words and her enthusiasm for tracing their origins and connections may be inherited. She also has a painter's eye for color and a good traveler's knack of finding, and adroitly describing, engaging people wherever she goes. These qualities make her account of zigzag journeys through the Egyptian desert, into the Sudan, and along the shores of the Red Sea like nothing one has read before. The continuity is sporadic; the sights, sounds, and sensibility are unique and magical.

The Spoils of War

edited by Elizabeth Simpson. Abrams, 336 pages, $49.50.

Looting may not have caused the first war (whenever in the mists of prehistory that occurred), but it has flourished in all known wars, and the Second World War was no exception. Works of art disappeared all across Europe, and thousands remain unaccounted for. As Lynn H. Nicholas puts it in her contribution to this book, items "were confiscated by governments, stolen by individuals, sold willingly or under duress, bartered for food, or simply hidden, forgotten, and randomly moved from place to place." Even when objects are found, determining legal ownership, combating various statutes of limitation, and locating heirs of deceased owners can cause interminable delays. This account of the situation begins with essays by scholars from various countries, summarizing what their national losses are. The scholarly pieces are followed by reports from people who collected stolen art at the end of the war or have tracked it down since. Their accounts are colloquial and sometimes peppery—good reading, and calculated to arouse sympathy for all the experts now contending with the enormous problems of who stole what, where it may be lurking, and who really owns it.

—Phoebe-Lou Adams

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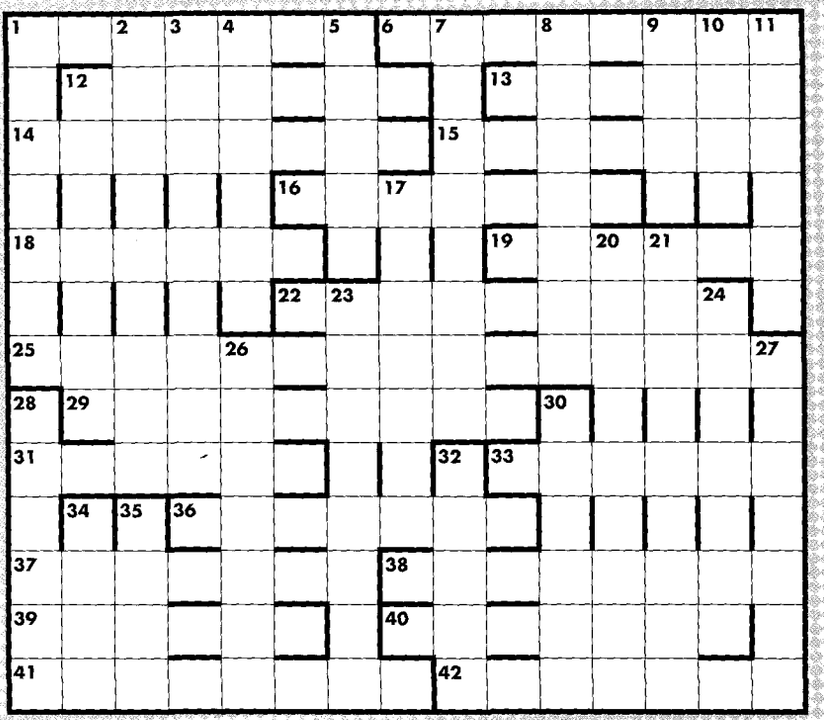
THE PUZZLER

by Emily Cox and Henry Rathvon

Celebrating the Fourth

Overcome by patriotic fervor, we've decided to mark the Fourth of July in a celebration with our solvers. We hope you'll 25 Across! In the clues, answer lengths have been withheld because proceedings such as these, we believe, are best kept in the dark. Nine answers are capitalized.

The solution to last month's Puzzler appears on page 109.



Across

1. Inflamed over floor layer set the wrong way
6. Someone delivering socks for Mister Hurt
12. Light source frames center of optical instrument
13. Relative's name set in marble
14. Small fry around back of beer joints
15. Lay on one's back for exercise (*hyphenated*)
16. Peg maintains routine part of a diet
18. In one show's debut, get solid financial backers
19. Strikeout boy recalled when standing around Little League mounds
22. Part of the Middle East turns a kid off
25. *See instructions*
29. American city with almost too many of the French next to it
31. Phony's regret: bribe returned
33. Skip around front of lobby, wearing suit
36. Detective is in front of your compact
37. Measure copper part of a key
38. Barge carrying one-time movie actor
39. West of town, caliph settled down
40. Hands back Saint Timothy
41. Pound tries new volumes
42. Hill dweller by border's creating songs

Down

1. Pay for feature of a kitchen stove sent back
2. Understatement in fictional stories about youngster
3. Start off well-educated and get redundant?
4. A record number turned on a country
5. A man's name your newspaper printed up
7. Guy having small fuss with big beast
8. Con gets inside a boat's aft
9. Prevent the speech of a loony
10. Island tribe of Native Americans uprising, in case
11. Meal leftover includes pop
12. Affirmative: in Cordoba, Koppel is placed
17. Organ note captivates half of us in a Hal Roach comedy (*two words*)
20. Churning tool hit bonelike particle
21. Attack contained by former French pirate
23. Joiner of a French and Roman road
24. Knuckleheads initially notice some navels
26. Rumor of beast heard
27. Wearing clothes, Glen almost bolts
28. Heroical type aboard train
30. Plastic I found in factory
32. Abraham's upset about the origin of his kingdom
34. Buddy has large, rounded protuberance
35. Pop group's rhyme scheme for a quatrain

Note: The instructions above are for this month's puzzle only. It is assumed that you know how to decipher clues. For a complete introduction to clue-solving, send an addressed, stamped long envelope to The Atlantic Puzzler, 77 North Washington Street, Boston, Mass. 02114.

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WORD COURT

by Barbara Wallraff

A friend and I sat on my balcony one night just talking, and at one point I attempted to say that I was a fan of genericness*—that's the word that came out of my mouth. It seems to me that some such term—*genericness *or* genericity *or* genericticity*—should exist. Is there one? If not, I hereby dub* genericticity *the all-encompassing noun form of* generic.

Michael Reilly
Austin, Texas

Some people like to have a gadget for every purpose in their kitchens; others would rather make do with basic, versatile tools, particularly if they only rarely need, say, a vol-au-vent template or a cake saw. By the same token, maybe you often find yourself discussing generic things or generic qualities and will use your word a lot (if so, do note that *-ness* and *-ity*, but not *-ticity*, appear in dictionaries as suffixes meaning "quality; state"). Or maybe you don't, and won't (in which case you could have said you're a fan of the generic). Of course, coining a word is only the first step toward introducing it into the language, just as patenting a gadget only begins to make a place for it in our culture. It's up to people in the aggregate to decide whether there's a need for the invention and whether it will endure.

I am bothered by the increasing misuse among Chicago newscasters of the noun suspect. *The word is an important protection for a person suspected but not yet convicted of a crime. No doubt the statement "A man has been stabbed and the police are searching for* suspects*" (when they have no idea who that might be) is meant as bending over backwards to be fair. But doesn't it tend to undermine the very principle of "innocent until proven guilty" by making* suspect *a synonym for* perpetrator*?*

Ruth F. Hanke
Chicago, Ill.

A spokesperson for the National Association of Chiefs of Police and representatives of the legal profession agree with you that *suspect* can be insidious. The paradox is that although the police are indeed searching for *perpetrators* and *killers* and so on, anyone they arrest will necessarily be merely a *suspect* until he or she is found guilty of the crime.

My critics tell me that because I was born in 1914, I am old-fashioned and not in tune with current usage. But how can I be complacent when reporters and talk-show hosts seem unable to differentiate between nouns and verbs? For example, "a good read*" or "your* take *on this."*

J. Ramsey Speer
Washington, N.C.

English has always allowed verbs to be pressed into service as nouns, and nouns as verbs. The linguist Otto Jespersen, in his seminal *Growth and Structure of the English Language* (published nine years before you were born), called the "freedom with which a form which was originally a verb is used unchanged as a substantive" a "characteristic peculiarity" of our language, and he even gave some instances of words exhibiting a "curious oscillation . . . between noun and verb." *Frame*, for example, was initially a verb, meaning "to form"; then it became a noun meaning a "border," as in "picture *frame*"; and from there the verb acquired the new meaning "to put a frame around."

Nonetheless, it's your choice when you will begin to accept recently adapted words—and which ones. The verbs *to gift*, *to impact*, and *to parent*, notably, as well as the nouns *take* and *read*, are widely disliked—and who needs them? *To fax* and *to Rollerblade* are almost inevitable coinages, though, because the activities they describe are new, and new language must be found for them. Beyond such practical considerations lie matters of taste. With language we all communicate not only what we're trying to say but also how trendy or traditional we are.

Recently, when I was student-teaching in an eighth-grade classroom, my cooperating teacher and I had a falling-out over the spelling of all right. *I had read that it was okay to use the less formal spelling,* alright, *in works of fiction, and was allowing my students to use this spelling in their short stories. When my cooperating teacher discovered this, she nearly blew a gasket, insisting that there is only one correct spelling:* all right. *Since this incident I have repeatedly seen* alright *in movie titles, headlines, and stories. Is* alright *all right to use informally?*

Lisa Biggar
Flagstaff, Ariz.

The last time I looked into it, eighth-graders didn't seem to need any help in expressing themselves informally. But they'll never learn the grown-up, relatively formal, standard modes of expression unless they are taught them. *Alright* is emphatically not standard English.

Have you recently had a language dispute that you would like this column to resolve? Write to Word Court in care of *The Atlantic Monthly*, 77 North Washington Street, Boston, MA 02114, or send E-mail to MsGrammar@TheAtlantic.com. All letters become the property of Word Court.

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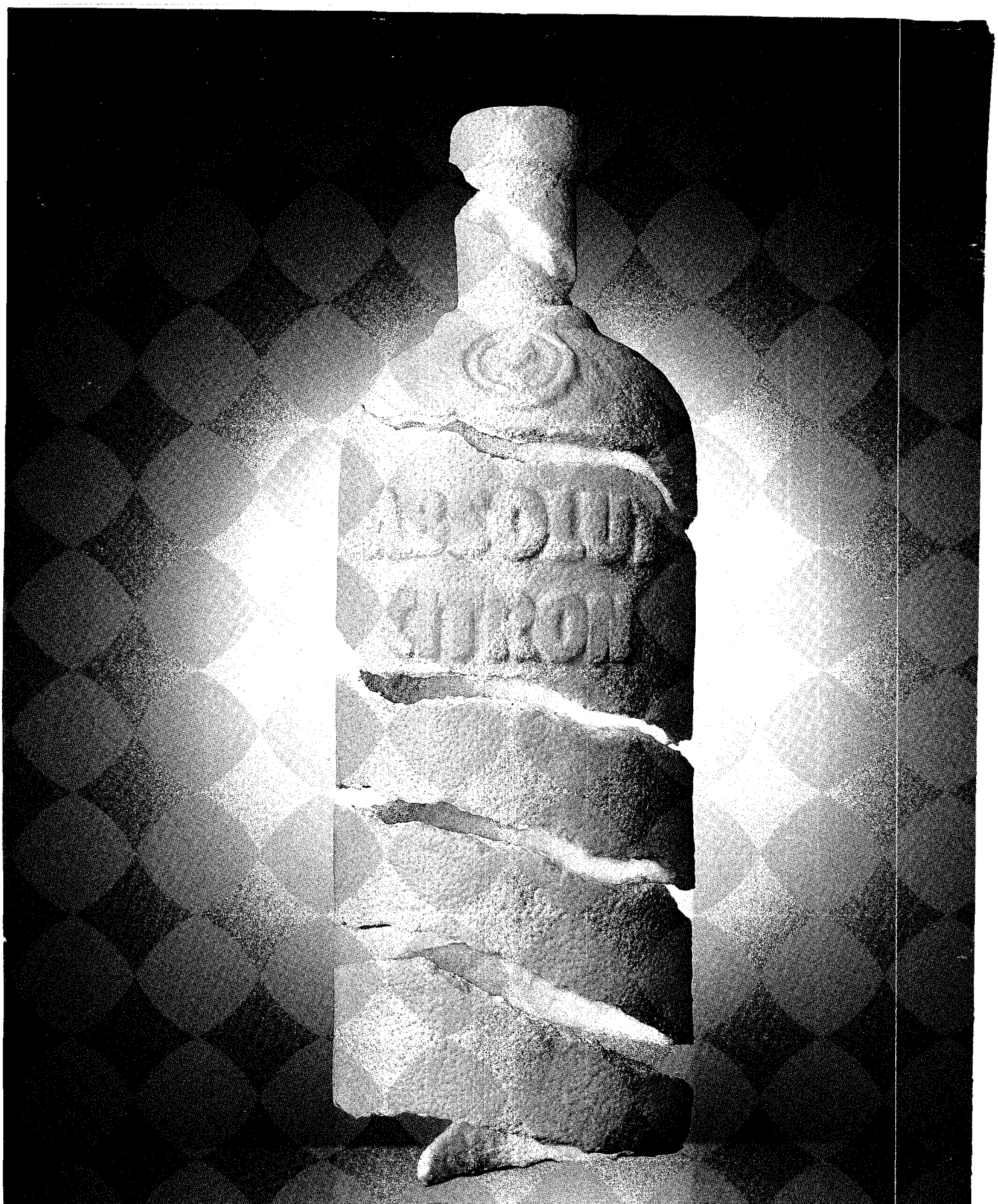

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